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Faith in Action for Social Justice

THE EARTH AWAKENS

BY WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

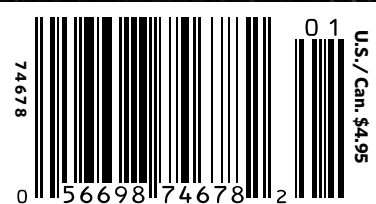
*A long time ago, right
here on our home planet,
the prophet Hosea decried
a predatory economy that
was leading to environmental
disaster—and pointed the
way to a sustainable future.*

PLUS:

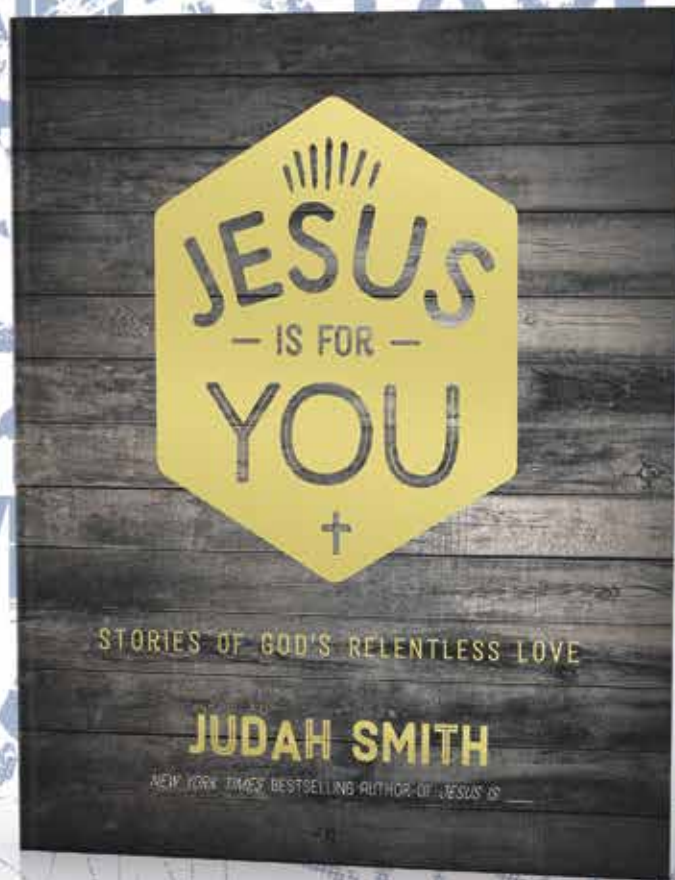
One Child left behind

Hollywood's same old same old

The crooked path of Iris DeMent



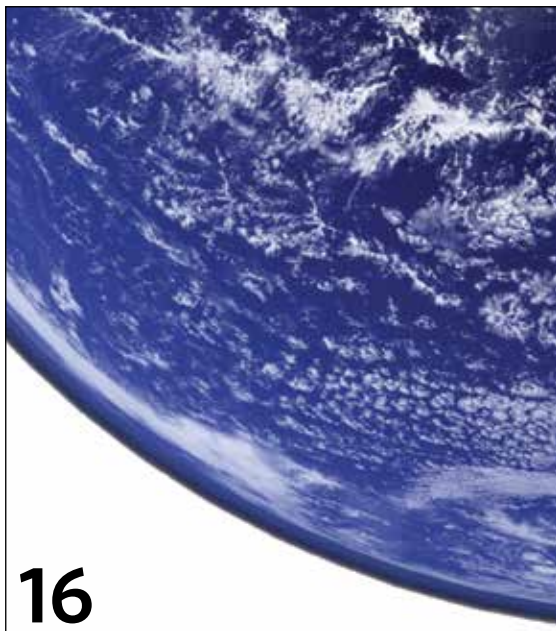
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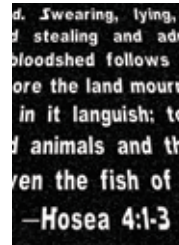


IN JULY 2015, a young female rapper from India released a music video calling on Unilever to take responsibility for the mercury contamination caused by one of their former factories in Kodaikanal. In lyrics set to the tune of Nicki Minaj's Grammy-nominated (and explicit) rap song "Anaconda," rapper Sofia Ashraf explained that "Unilever came and left devastation / As they exposed the land to contamination."

But Ashraf's song is clear: This isn't just about contaminated land. "Prolonged exposure got many men killed / There's children born being seriously ill / The environment is polluted still," she rapped. And she calls on

those in power to make amends for their greed: "Unilever, clean up your mess," chants Ashraf and a crowd of former factory workers in the video. In a related campaign against Unilever, former workers at the thermometer factory hold signs saying, "Dear Shareholders: We made you rich! And your company poisoned us!"

Ancient Israel didn't have rappers, but in our cover story Walter Brueggemann finds a remarkably similar analysis of wealth, greed, economic exploitation, and environmental devastation in the evocative lyrics of Hosea, an eighth century



Hebrew street poet. Along with Amos, Isaiah, and Micah, Hosea used "imaginative utterance" to disrupt a "seemingly secure economic arrangement" in which the rich enjoyed surplus wealth by exploiting everyone else.

And though we might be familiar with what the biblical prophets have to say about economic exploitation, Brueggemann takes it a step further, pointing out Hosea's warning that "economic violation leads to environmental disaster." Then as now, it behooves the people of God to pay heed to the poets among us. ■

Letters

Exposing Devious Lies

Thanks for the common sense and factual article "The Politics of Contraception," by Rachel Marie Stone (November 2015). I have personally been insulted by the propaganda some believe about Planned Parenthood. The affordable health care that women receive there is the only health care several have received. It is rewarding to know that the devious lies are being exposed, which is simply that responsible use of contraceptives actually reduces abortions.

Elain Edge
Rogers, Minnesota

What About the Birds and Bees?

I appreciated your balanced discussion of the issues facing Christians with regard to family planning ("The Politics of Contraception"), but it did omit one major reason why Christians have a responsibility to limit the size of families. Over the past 70 years, humans have used medical research to lengthen their lives and as a result have added almost 5 billion people to the world population. This has had disastrous consequences for many of the other occupants of our planet.

Do humans really have the right to beget as many children as they want and so squeeze out "the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and the beasts of the field" in the midst of which we have been set as stewards? If it is right for Christians to make use of

For anyone who takes the work of Christ seriously, it has to impact the way they treat others.

modern medical science to extend the length of their lives, is it not also right to use the advances of that same science to limit family size and reduce the destruction that humans are wreaking on God's creation?

Stephen Carr
Zomba, Malawi

Paul's Spiritual Manifesto

I enjoyed everything about the November 2015 article by Reta Halteman Finger—except the title and closing sentence. I don't believe we should call it "Paul's Political Manifesto" but rather a spiritual manifesto with political implications. If we say that portions of scripture are to be read as political manifestos, it could indicate that you can only find validity in scriptures that directly relate to current social conditions.

Instead, we should consider that all spiritual truths are going to have implications for societies in all ages. If Paul had been truly political, I think we would have specific views from him on slavery and the treatment of women and children. The declaration in Galatians 3:28 is a key passage on this point: Saying that there is no longer male or female, slave or free, was not a cry for political reform but the revealing of

a mind-blowing new community born out of the cosmic work of Christ. But for anyone who takes it seriously, it has to impact the way they treat others.

Mark Medin
Temecula, California

A Gift of Laughter

I experience many consciousness-raising articles and inspirational words in *Sojourners* magazine, and now I can say I have also laughed out loud at a recent reading. That reading, of course, was Ed Spivey Jr.'s essay "Answering the Call of the Mild" in the November 2015 issue. It was delightful to read his reaction to the "joys" of camping. Thank you for that gift!

Donna Milton
Marietta, Georgia

Correction

In our November 2015 issue, we published an incorrect photo of ARISE director Lourdes Flores, pictured here. We regret the error.



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BY JIM WALLIS

Lessons From a Wounded Healer



IN NOVEMBER I had the honor of delivering the first annual Henri Nouwen lecture at the University of Toronto. I was invited by the Henri Nouwen Society to speak about the connection between spirituality and social justice and to offer reflections about a remarkable man and the Sojourners community's relationship with him.

Henri Nouwen was a deeply spiritual and deeply human man whose life and work has inspired many of us in the extended Sojourners community for the last four decades. Our relationship with Nouwen goes back to the 1970s, when he often came to visit our budding community in Washington, D.C. As young firebrands with a passion for social justice, we learned much from Nouwen, who helped teach us the importance of a deep, authentic, contemplative spirituality, which we knew we needed to undergird the hard battles for social justice. Nouwen often shared with us that

Henri Nouwen's hunger and thirst for spiritual truth were never satisfied.

Sojourners, in turn, helped push him to not lose sight of the urgent struggles for justice and peace in the midst of his efforts to help people unlock a deeper spirituality.

What drew Nouwen to Sojourners, and us to him, was our common conviction that contemplative spirituality, which was his passion and vocation, had to be deeply connected to putting faith into action for justice in the world, which was ours. We spoke together about the dangers of people pursuing spirituality in a consumer culture, where resources aimed at the inner life could become just another commodity.

But we also talked of how activism for justice without a deepening inner life could so easily lead to burnout, despair, and cynicism. Conversations with Nouwen were often about the dynamic relationship between the life of the spirit and our life in the world, which often lived in real tension and called us all to a deeper and more integral faith.

I ESPECIALLY REMEMBER one visit Nouwen made to Sojourners that encapsulates this relationship and tension between spirituality and social justice. On this weekend, Brazilian Archbishop Hélder Câmara was in town to speak to a large church convention in a downtown hotel.

Dom Hélder's aides called to say that he felt "uncomfortable" in the big, fancy hotel and wanted to spend the afternoon in a "base community" like Sojourners. We were thrilled, so I hurried across town to pick him up. Together we walked through our poor and violent neighborhood, and I remember how comfortable and familiar with such streets the Catholic archbishop seemed to be.

The community quickly gathered, and because Nouwen also happened to be visiting us that weekend, the next several hours were some of the most memorable in our history. The highlight was the dialogue between Nouwen and Dom Hélder. The Dutch priest from the First World was relentless with questions for the Third World liberation archbishop. Nouwen could easily see the deep spiritual life of our other guest, which was so powerfully lived out in the world of poverty and injustice that was his parish.

Nouwen's hunger and thirst for spiritual truth were never satisfied, and that afternoon was no exception.

For a contemplative writer, Nouwen was not a placid man. His mind and heart were always probing, pushing further and further. That day, he seemed to sense that there were truths he would never find in the affluent First World, that his search would have to continue among the despised and rejected of the Third World.

In fact, Nouwen would later leave the academic cocoon of Yale to make a pilgrimage to Latin America—which I believe was at least partly motivated by the conversation he had with Dom Hélder that day. I also believe Henri Nouwen would have deeply responded to the visit of Pope Francis to the United States this fall, as so many of us did.

The intensity of his spiritual search was Nouwen's most remarkable quality. We spent countless hours together talking, walking, and very often anguishing about the deepest questions of his own life and faith. I remember the very personal and vulnerable conversations I had with Nouwen, a man who wrote about the importance of being a "wounded healer."

Henri Nouwen was not a Christian who had it all figured out. On the contrary, Nouwen wrestled like Jacob with the God he so dearly loved. And that made him wrestle with all of us too. Nouwen leaves us with a rich liturgy and library of spiritual struggle.

In a world where social justice is too often bereft of spirituality, and where spiritual contemplation too often causes people to isolate themselves from the urgent problems of society, Henri Nouwen's life provides a needed example of how to encounter and incorporate both into one's life and work. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Daniel Etter/Redux



Life-Saving Hospitality

While many European countries have reduced their sea-rescue work in order to deter refugees, members of Sea Watch plan their route across the Mediterranean to distribute water, life vests, and first-aid supplies to boats filled with refugees in danger of drowning or dying of thirst. “We have decided to fight for the humanization of politics,” said the group. “Hospitality should once again be the norm. A civil sea rescue service must be created. The EU is not willing to do so. Therefore, we are taking the initiative.”

By Kerry Weber

The Year of Mercy

During an election year, the quality of mercy is sometimes strained.

SHORTLY AFTER THE November mid-term elections, Pope Francis officially launched a campaign of his own—although one with a decidedly different tone than that of most politicians. Dec. 8 marked the start of the “year of mercy,” which in Francis’ words is a chance for the church to consider how it “can make more evident its mission of being a witness of mercy.”

This challenge is not one that seems to have taken root in our political conversation, and I’ve seen little evidence of it in the presidential candidate debates. In a year when we will democratically elect a leader of one of the most powerful nations in the world, how will mercy figure into the strategy?

Specially designated “jubilee years” are a Christian tradition that began in the early 14th century, based on the biblical mandate in Leviticus 25 and Jesus’ call for the “year of the Lord’s favor” in Luke 4. In the Catholic tradition, jubilee years serve as calls to grow in one’s relationship with God

through prayer, blessings, and penance.

Of course, calling this time a year of mercy doesn’t mean that it’s the *only* year we are called to focus on mercy; rather it is an effort to get the church and the world to consider the quality of mercy more closely, more

“A good political leader seizes the moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism.” —Pope Francis

deeply, so it permeates our daily lives and influences our actions. (Like a New Year’s resolution that actually sticks!)

Pope Francis’ document announcing the jubilee year was addressed not only to Catholics but “to all who read this letter.” He urges us all to view the year as a time to recommit to the corporal works of mercy laid out in Matthew 25—acts such as feeding

the hungry, sheltering the homeless, and visiting the imprisoned—and to prayer and reconciliation. Francis wants to make clear that God’s mercy is available to all and all are called to participate in such acts.

This universal call to service and reconciliation is particularly apt during a year that also holds a U.S. presidential election. Most of us simply endure the discouraging arguments among politicians or candidates tearing each other down while glossing over their own shortcomings.

Could the year of mercy offer a way forward in our national political conversation? Although it won’t likely come up during the debates, this call for true introspection, for repentance of sins both personal and systemic, is one our nation’s leaders and prospective leaders could take to heart.

“A good political leader is one who, with the interests of all in mind, seizes the

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moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism," Francis told Congress during his visit to the United States. "A good political leader always opts to initiate processes rather than possessing spaces."

A commitment to mercy can lead to true dialogue and to the sort of open and honest conversations our nation needs to overcome our often-fractious politics. Repeatedly during his visit last fall, Francis emphasized the importance of dialogue. While addressing Congress, he held up the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, calling him "a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions," and called for dialogue between "countries which have been at odds."

In speaking with Catholic bishops about

leadership, Francis reminded them that "dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the 11th hour, to propose his offer of love." He described dialogue as "the path ahead," one that requires "courage and daring."

The year of mercy is an opportunity. It calls all people to true engagement with each other, so that we might more closely emulate the love of God, who always thinks in terms of covenants, not campaign promises.

Kerry Weber is the managing editor of America magazine and the author of Mercy in the City: How to Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, Visit the Imprisoned, and Keep Your Day Job.

By Chris Seiple

Getting to Root Causes

Three ways Christians can respond to the ISIS crisis.

EVERY TIME I travel from Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, to Dohuk, Iraq, my drivers point to the same bridge. This, they say, is where ISIS was stopped by U.S. air power, just 15 miles from Erbil. It is a vital reminder that Kurdistan has twice been a safe haven: in the 1991 aftermath of the first Gulf War, to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein, and again last year when ISIS was at the city gates.

When I look on the Nineveh Plain just south of Kurdistan, it's hard not to recall Cyrus the Great, who once conquered this entire part of the world. The book of Isaiah recounts God's words to the mighty king, a nonbeliever, one who didn't follow the God of Israel: "For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, *though you do not acknowledge me*" (emphasis added).

The chaos and violence in this region continues to drive people from their homes. Currently, Kurdistan is the temporary "home" of 1.1 million people fleeing ISIS. Most are people of faith—Muslims, Christians, and Yazidis. The ripple effects spread out to refugee camps from Jordan to Germany.

Many U.S. Christians don't think of God

when it comes to geopolitics. We sometimes reduce Christ "the Lord of all" to Christ "our personal savior." We might not be comfortable with the idea that if Christ is truly sovereign, then that includes our global politics.

As people of faith, we never give up hope, even in the violent situation in the Middle East, which promises to get worse before it gets better. Here are three steps you can take to address the ISIS crisis and its violent ripple effects:

1. Foremost, pray and fast, like the biblical hero Esther, about what you and your church can do. Research organizations working in the region and learn their theory of change. Commit to praying by name for people living and working on the frontlines of the crisis.

2. Think about how your church might get to know people from the Middle East living in the United States. It is less easy to fall in to stereotypes when you get to know someone who doesn't pray like you do. Review the example of Northwood Church in Keller, Texas, whose multifaith efforts are practical and mutually respectful and do not water down the Christian, or Muslim, faith identity.

From the Archives

January 1983

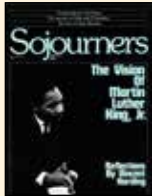
The Face of Juan Mendez

THE MEN who abducted Juan Mendez at gunpoint asked no questions before turning him over to another group. “They claimed to be army, but I’m positive they were Federal Police of the Province of Buenos Aires, intelligence section,” he says matter-of-factly.

“There was no interrogation without torture, other than name, address, and what I had been doing at the bus stop. Then they stripped me naked and tied me very tightly, spread-eagled on top of a table, with a lot of strain, very much stretched out. And they applied an electrical prod on me and a lot of heavy blows with fists and kicks. One electrical prod that they use (they have two kinds) is a traditional cattle prod. It’s supposed to be less painful. I’ve never tried it; the one they used on me is a more sophisticated instrument. It produces a buzz and can be regulated. It’s much more manageable. At the beginning the shocks were much less painful than they were toward the end.” He speaks in a flat monotone, totally devoid of any emotion, slowly, so that you will not fail to understand. Juan Mendez could be giving a history lecture, and in a way he is. ...

People would tell him after listening to his story that forgetting is all you can do. Pretend it happened a long time ago, to someone else. But Juan Mendez cannot forget, will never forget. Nor now, after seeing his face, will I. ■

Sarah Ban Breathnach was a Washington, D.C. writer when this article appeared.



3. Consider how you might assist those who have fled the violence. Can you provide aid in the form of food, shelter, or clothing to those inside Iraq and Syria or to those fleeing to Europe? Or perhaps you could support those who are working on issues of trauma and education? Most refugee children in Iraq and Syria have lost at least a year of schooling, and all are traumatized. Their parents are traumatized as well and need mental-health care and new skill sets. Currently, there are only four psychiatrists for every 1 million residents in Iraq, reports Doctors Without Borders.

Everyone can do something, but the actions listed above, despite the great need, are nevertheless just bandages. The root cause of the crisis must be addressed: Stop the flow of refugees and help people return to the homes they fled.

It was, after all, Cyrus’ defeat of Babylon

that allowed the Jews to return home. But that kind of geopolitical solution, of the diaspora returning to their homes, inherently requires stability and places of security—for example, establishing safe havens in Iraq and Syria that protect *all* those fleeing ISIS. This must be done in the context of a clear vision and strategy for the region—rooted in a Muslim-led defeat of ISIS, backed by a Muslim-led “Marshall Plan” and the promise of a regional security structure that includes both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Such a possibility, however, requires Christians to think anew about how God works, even in geopolitics. ■

Chris Seiple is president emeritus and chair of the board for the Institute for Global Engagement. He travels frequently to the region on behalf of IGE’s Cradle Fund initiative.

By Rachel M. MacNair

One Child Left Behind

Forced abortions may decrease, but China’s government coercion is unchanged.

IN OCTOBER, China’s Communist Party leadership announced the end of its nearly 40-year-old “one child” policy, announcing that all married couples could now have two children.

The one-child policy in China was established by Deng Xiaoping in the mid-1970s, first as a voluntary program, then as federal policy. He said it was necessary to make sure that “the fruits of economic growth are not devoured by population growth.” His tool for ensuring economic growth was the large-scale control of women’s bodies. The results have been well-documented: massive numbers of coerced abortions and sterilizations and women with “unapproved” pregnancies avoiding prenatal medical care for fear of such coercion. Women have been and continue to be intensely traumatized by a government policy that is indifferent to their pain.

This policy has also disrupted the gender balance in China. The introduction of ultrasound technology that easily identifies the baby’s gender *in utero* has led to female feticide—sex-selective abortions. Millions of

little girls are dead because they were girls and not boys. Women are aborting their daughters *because* of their shared gender. What does this do to women’s own self-esteem and self-image?

This is not a glitch in China’s system of population control, but a central feature of it. If you have 50 women and one polygamous man, you can have many babies at once. But if you have 50 men and one woman, you get no more babies than if you have only one fertile man and one woman. If reducing the overall number of people is your goal, then targeting females gets you more bang for the buck, so to speak.

Now, nearly four decades later, China has ended the one-child policy and raised the ceiling to a two-child limit. The number of specific pregnancies aborted may diminish, but the change in law did not include an end to coercion. Perhaps couples who have a son or who can try for one with the second child will let one daughter live. But if both children are daughters, the same violence against females for being females is likely to occur.

With the current gender imbalance in China, large numbers of men can't find wives at all. As a result prostitution, sex trafficking, and rape have increased.

So the aspect of massive violence against women hasn't been solved. It may be ameliorated, but the root of the intensive control of women's lives remains.

One question we have to ask is why has such an astonishingly massive amount of blatant violence against women received so little attention from women's rights advocates? I think it's because of the idea of abortion itself as a matter of "women's rights." Admitting there are times when abortion so clearly means violence against women would require saying something negative about abortion. If it's "a woman's right," then it may appear to threaten that right to admit to its use as a tool in the context of blatant male domination.

But in the United States, the same problems are simply more subtle. The government doesn't coerce women, but abusive male partners and parents of teens sometimes do. Pressure is more common than outright social or political coercion. And poverty is the most widespread and cruellest pressure of all.

In the U.S. it is less common to have selective abortions based on gender, but a child detected *in utero* with disabilities is in deep trouble. If born or adopted into a loving family, plenty of parents find raising such children to be full of joy. But far too many aren't allowed to be born at all.

So China has gone from a policy of massive attacks on its own women and prenatal girls to a policy in which presumably fewer individuals are attacked. The root problem, however, remains.

China's policy was allowed to develop without the worldwide outcry warranted for such astonishing brutality targeted toward women because of the idea of abortion as a right. Somehow coercing someone into a "right" seems less bad. But whenever we solve problems by dehumanizing and killing the most vulnerable, the violence grabs other people into its web as well. ■

Rachel M. MacNair is director of the Institute for Integrated Social Analysis for Consistent Life. She lives in Kansas City, Mo.



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The Problem with Prejudice

POPE FRANCIS arrived in the United States amid a flurry of talk about Muslims. There was Ben Carson's statement that he would not want a Muslim to be president. There was The Donald's promise that a Trump administration would look into the supposed network of Muslim terrorist training camps in the United States. And there was young Ahmed Mohamed in Texas, who got suspended from school and shackled in handcuffs when his science project was mistaken for a bomb. Maybe the police were concerned that he'd designed it in one of those fictitious terrorist camps.

It appears that many Americans are in a panic about the prospect of a Muslim takeover.

Domination by a foreign religion is an old anxiety in America. As we hang on every word Pope Francis utters, it is interesting to note that for much of our history a driving fear was that Catholics would amass significant political power



Mostly, it has been met with applause. The papal flag was indeed flying at the White House during the pope's arrival ceremony—several thousand of them in fact, more than a few in the hands of the many non-Catholics in attendance. Recent surveys show that Catholics, along with Jews and mainline Protestants, are among the most well-liked religious groups in the United States.

How did Catholics go from suffering what historian Arthur Schlesinger called “the deepest bias in the history of the American people” to being widely embraced and influential? Largely I think it is because there is a wide recognition that Catholics make a positive impact in the United States. Some of the country's best universities, including Georgetown and Notre Dame, are Catholic. There are hundreds of Catholic hospitals, thousands of Catholic elementary and high schools, and countless Catholic social service agencies, almost all

of which heal, educate, and help a substantial number of non-Catholics.

WE LAUGH WHEN we think about past fears that such institutions were Trojan Horses carrying the scourge of popery, but consider for a moment what might have happened if the forces of anti-Catholic prejudice had won. The Catholic contribution to America—all those schools and hospitals and universities—might have been blocked.

Now imagine if Ahmed Mohamed's clock had not somehow become a national scandal, and if he instead had served out his

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three-day suspension from school in disgrace, suffered the Islamophobic taunts that would have most certainly followed, and decided that nurturing his scientific talents and contributing them to the world was simply not worth the trouble.

The problem with prejudice is not just the way it violates the dignity of the targeted individual or community, but also the barrier it erects to their contribution, especially the kind that are the lifeblood of any democratic society.

Every inspiring sentence the pope speaks ought to remind us of what we might have missed if the anti-Catholic prejudice of the past had prevented his presence in America, and what we might be losing out on now if we allow other forms of bias to fester. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage.

Consider for a moment what might have happened if the forces of anti-Catholic prejudice had won.

and the pope would fly his flag at the White House. “Our freedom, our religious freedom, is at stake if we elect a member of the Roman Catholic order as president of the United States,” Norman Vincent Peale warned in September 1960 about John F. Kennedy's candidacy.

With 30 percent of Congress now claiming to be Catholic, six Catholics sitting on the Supreme Court, several Catholics occupying high office (including the vice president, the secretary of state, and the speaker of the House), and a pope with much to say about major policy issues, that particular apocalypse appears to have arrived.

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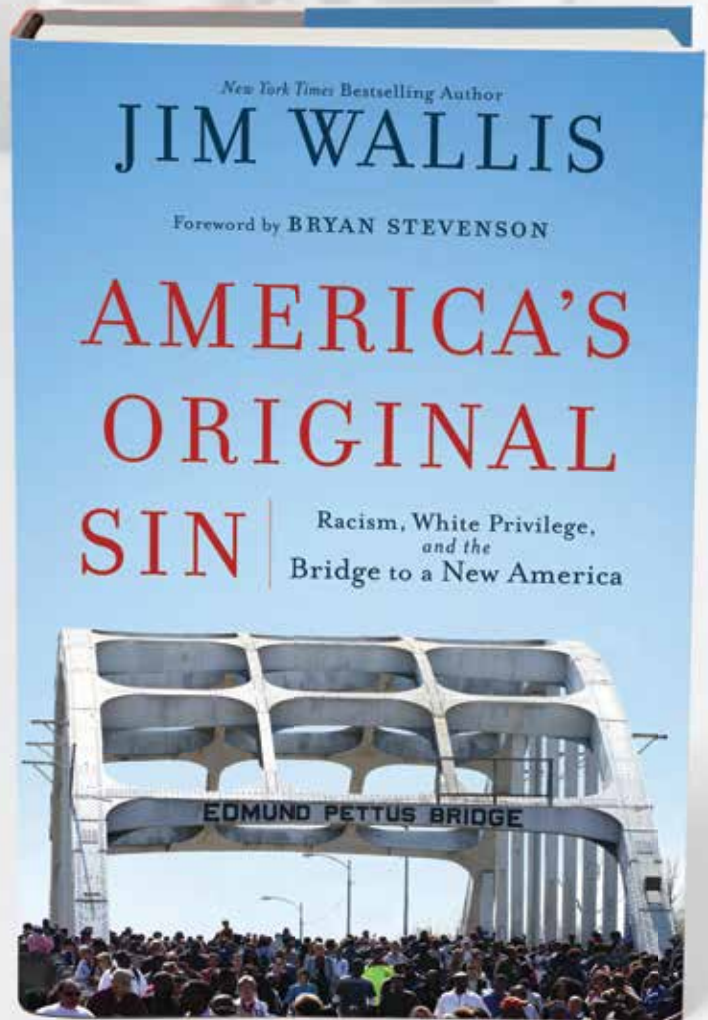
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The Language of Angels

SHORTLY BEFORE Irish poet Seamus Heaney died in 2013, he texted these last words to his wife, Marie: *Noli timere*. Be not afraid.

I'm not sure if Heaney, who was described by Robert Lowell as "the most important Irish poet since Yeats," *knew* this was his last text and final words, but I suspect he did.

It's a sad commentary that when the Twitterverse got hold of Heaney's message, no one could figure out what it meant or where it was from. Many did not recognize the angels' message to Zechariah (Luke 1:13) or Mary (Luke 1:30) or the shepherds (Luke 2:10) or Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20): Be not afraid.

Heaney understood words as "bearers of history and mystery." As a distinguished translator of poetry from Greek, Latin, Italian, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Middle Scots, he

Heaney understood words as "bearers of history and mystery."

had plenty of languages to choose from. But he chose St. Jerome's fourth century vulgate version of the Bible. He chose the language of the angels.

In "Alphabets," Heaney describes a boy learning Latin:

Declensions sang on air like a
hosanna
As, column after stratified column,
Book One of *Elementa Latina*,
Marbled and minatory, rose up in
him.

That Latin, learned first from his mother, then in school, Heaney later described as a "shape-note language," as "the risen, aqueous, singular, lucent O / Like a magnified and buoyant ovum."

During the final seven days of Advent, we sing the O Antiphons, calling out the names of Christ: O Sapientia (wisdom). O Radix Jesse



(root of Jesse). O Oriens (day-spring). We sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Then candle-lit churches fill slowly with "O Holy Night" until joy reaches the roofline and spills out onto the world.

But what of Heaney's final words? *Noli timere*. Luke's gospel holds a taut paradox around the theme "to fear" and "not to fear," both of which Jesus commands. The fear that Mary articulates in the Magnificat and in her encounter with the angel is not a panic that diminishes but instead an overwhelming gratitude at the mystery of goodness. The other fear—terror, anger, shock—is one Jesus cautions against. Fear in this sense can be antithetical to belief.

Today our fears can be equally crippling. Fear for our safety. Fear of economic insecurity. Fear of rejection or commitment. Fear of failing, loss, or death. Sadly, our market economy has even monetized fear. The more our fears increase, the more somebody can make a buck off them.

Can we hold open Heaney's "lucent O" within us long enough to expose

our deepest fears, to take the angel's message to heart? Unexamined fear paralyzes. Fear as a perpetual state keeps us small. Fear refuses magnificence. It shackles the tongue, chokes back hosannas.

One of Heaney's earliest poems, "Scaffolding," was written for his wife, Marie, in a difficult moment in their marriage. "So if, my dear, there sometimes seems to be / Old bridges breaking between you and me / Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall / Confident that we have built our wall." Love and fidelity, both tender and tough, keep fear beyond the door.

When news spread of Heaney's death and last text message to his wife, an Irish graffiti artist named Maser painted "Don't Be Afraid" in block letters on the side of a building in a gritty part of Dublin. He did it, he said, "for good people in hard times."

Noli timere, as if the angel Gabriel spray-painted it there himself. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.





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***HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD,
O people of Israel; for the Lord has
an indictment against the inhabitants
of the land. There is no faithfulness
or loyalty, and no knowledge of God
in the land. Swearing, lying, and
murder, and stealing and adultery
break out; bloodshed follows blood-
shed. Therefore the land mourns, and
all who live in it languish; together
with the wild animals and the birds
of the air, even the fish of the sea
are perishing. —Hosea 4:1-3***

The Earth Awakens

Reading Hosea in the age of climate change.

by WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

WHEN WE CONSIDER the crisis of climate change, many of us swing back and forth between a narrative of despair in which “there is nothing we can do” and a narrative of hope that affirms that good futures are available when we act responsibly. Surely *Laudato Si'*, the encyclical released by Pope Francis last spring, has given enormous impetus to the narrative of possibility, summoning us to act intentionally and systemically about climate change.

The issue of climate change is a recent one, but the matter of revivifying the creation is a very old one in faith. In ancient Israel, as now, care for creation required a vision of an alternative economy grounded in fidelity.

The economy of ancient Israel, a small economy, was controlled and administered by the socio-political elites in the capital cities of Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south. Those elites clustered around the king and included the priests, the scribes, the tax collectors, and no doubt other powerful people. Those urban elites extracted wealth from the small, at-risk peasant-farmers who at best lived a precarious subsistence life. The process of extraction included taxation and high interest rates on loans. These were financial arrangements that drove many of the peasants into

hopeless debt so that they were rendered helpless in the economy.

While that arrangement was exploitative, it no doubt appeared, at least from an urban perspective, to be normal, because the surplus wealth and the high standard of living it made possible seemed natural and guaranteed. The power people who operated the economy could assume surplus wealth, and the exploited peasants were impotent in the face of that power. The arrangement appeared to be safe to perpetuity.

Speeches of judgment

Except that a strange thing happened in ancient Israel in the eighth century B.C.E. (750-700 B.C.E.). There appeared in Israel, inexplicably, a series of unconnected, uncredentialed poets who by their imaginative utterance disrupted that seemingly secure economic arrangement. We char-

acteristically list in that period of Israelite history four prophets—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. They came from various backgrounds, but they shared a common passion and a stylized mode of evocative speech.

The “normative” economy of the period had assumed that the economy consisted of only two participants: 1) the

Even without
scientific data,
the prophet Hosea
judged community-
destroying greed to
be unsustainable.



productive peasants, and 2) the *urban elites*, who did not work or produce anything but who lived well off of peasant produce. Those uncredentialed poets, however, dared to imagine and to utter that there was, inescapably, a third participant in the political economy: namely, the *emancipatory God of the Exodus*.

In effect, these poets spoke God into the political-economic process, and the presence of that remembered, spoken God of course changed the economic calculus for all parties. These poets invited (required!) the urban elites to reimagine and reconfigure the economy so that they had to answer

was compelled by God to step outside the approved conduct of society and to embrace a Torah-violator who could well have been executed for her conduct.

The imagery of this poem presents God as an offended husband and Israel as an offending wife. Such imagery is deeply problematic for us in our own gender-aware context. It is, nevertheless, the text we are given in Hosea. It is part of our interpretive responsibility and freedom to see how such ancient imagery might play in our own imagination when we move the poem from that ancient context to our own.

That divine command that Hosea obeyed

A high standard of living based on extraction insists that all else (including cheap labor) must be regarded as dispensable commodities.

to the God of covenant, whereas they had assumed prior to the prophets that they were autonomous economic players who could do what they wanted without restraint.

Specifically the prophets, with rich variation, spoke “speeches of judgment” whereby Yahweh, the God of the Exodus and covenant, uttered an indictment for the ways in which the urban elites had violated God’s intention for society. That indictment, moreover, was regularly matched to a judicial sentence that anticipated trouble for those who were not restrained by God’s commandments. These indictments regularly concerned injustice that violated the well-being of vulnerable neighbors or profanation that violated God’s sovereign intention.

The poets, in their daring imagination, were able to assert that violations of human justice or violations of divine holiness would inescapably be followed by sorry consequences enacted against the offending elites.

Summoned to durable love

Here I will consider the imaginative utterance of one of these prophets, Hosea, who was the only northern prophet of the period and who appeared sometime in the latter part of the eighth century. Hosea is perhaps best known for his report that God commanded him to “go, love ... an adulteress” (3:1). This command meant that Hosea

caused him to experience, exhibit, and give voice to the pathos (suffering love) in his own life that he then discerned as well in the life of God. He came to understand by his humiliating social experience that life consists not in stern rule-keeping but in the exercise of mercy and compassion that moves well beyond rules.

Among Hosea’s utterances of this new awareness that moves beyond quid-pro-quo formal relations are these three poetic utterances: 1) “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6). 2) “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you” (10:12). 3) “But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God” (12:6).

These brief utterances provide a cluster of relational terms that are definitional for Hosea and for covenantal relationships in a society ordered by Yahweh. Thus in 6:6 we have “steadfast love” and “knowledge of God,” in 10:12, it is “righteousness” and “steadfast love,” and in 12:6 “steadfast love and justice.” (See also Hosea 2:19-20.) This cluster of terms altogether specifies covenantal loyalty that will sustain durable relationships of well-being in every circumstance. The recurring term in all three cases is “steadfast

love”; commitment to other covenant partners overrides all other considerations. Hosea understood both that Yahweh will practice such durable love and that Israelites are summoned to such durable love of neighbor.

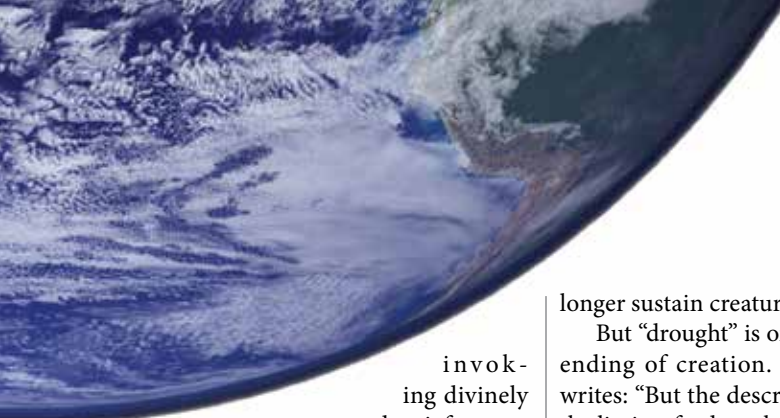
Disrupting the “business model”

In 4:1-3, Hosea conjured in his poetic imagination, against an assumed social reality conducted on a “business model,” that Yahweh had filed a legal suit against Israel for violating the requirement of steadfast love. Notice that everything depends upon Hosea’s utterance. Without his poetic courage, the business model of acquisitive economics would seem normal and would not be interrupted or critiqued. But now he has spoken, and the political economy can no longer proceed as before in numbed innocence.

The indictment of this poetic utterance begins with a generic charge: “There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1). Hosea uses the same terms as in 6:6. These terms specify that Israel has not taken neighborly solidarity seriously but has permitted the exploitative acquisition of wealth to override relational reality. They have treated the economy as though it were autonomous and without reference to neighborly reality.

The more specific charge against Israel is voiced in 4:2: “Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed.” This terse catalogue, in very strong verbal form, is clearly an allusion to the Ten Commandments given at Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). That list of commands expresses the most elemental, nonnegotiable requirements of life with Yahweh. The commandments offer a clear alternative to the exploitative economy of Pharaoh (see Exodus 5:4-19). The commandments insist that God’s holiness must not be reduced to a commodity (Exodus 20:1-7), and that neighborly relationships must not be violated in exploitative ways (20:8-17).

And now, says Hosea, Israel in its political economy has systematically violated the commandments. The violation includes exploitation of many kinds: Swearing (cursing):



We can no longer imagine an acquisitive economy as though there were no long-term consequences.

invoking divinely caused misfortune on others; Lying: false witness in court; Murder: treating human life as expendable; Stealing: sharp economic practice, perhaps wage theft; Adultery: reducing human relations to commodity transactions.

This unmistakable reference to Sinai bespeaks an economic practice whereby human neighbors are regarded as dispensable commodities that may be readily exploited in the interest of profit and surplus. The intent of this “speech of judgment” is that such practice is unsustainable and is sure to evoke harsh divine response.

The next word in the poem, “therefore,” is a rhetorical wonder that recurs often in prophetic utterance. It is a term that connects the “indictment” with the “judicial sentence” to follow. It is as though the poet traces inescapable outcomes and consequences of such violations. Hosea insists that this sorry exploitative urban regime cannot operate with impunity, even if it imagines that it can. There is no such prospect, because in prophetic imagination God presides over the economic enterprise and will not permit such exploitation to go unrequited.

This “therefore” is an act of emotive imagination. It does not offer reasons or explanations or trace connections between the indictment and the sentence. Rather, it gives expression to the unrelieved abhorrence of Hosea (and of God) that someone in Israel could treat others in Israel this way.

Economic violation leads to environmental disaster

The judicial sentence that follows the “therefore” is astonishing. The poet names the usual triad of creation: “wild animals, birds, and fish.” That is, the creatures on the earth, above the earth, and the creatures in the waters around the earth. Said otherwise, the sentence voices an anticipation for “all who live in it.” All creatures of our God and king! All of them are “perishing”; they are disappearing. The reason they are disappearing is because of drought; the phrase “the land mourns” is an idiom for drought. The earth shrivels and dries up and can no

longer sustain creaturely life.

But “drought” is only a hint of the total ending of creation. James Luther Mays writes: “But the description really outruns the limits of a drought or any other empirical situation; it portrays a loss of vitality by land and population that affects every creature, even the fish. The catastrophe is not merely a drought, though partially pictured by drought-vocabulary, but a terrible diminution of life forces which tends to total absence of life.”

The poetic, rhetorical sequence of indictment and judicial sentence linked by “therefore” concerns the socio-economic violation of neighborliness and the wounding of creation through an acute environmental crisis. The “therefore” is not an exact formulation, for such analysis was not available to the prophet. Nor is it a magical form of supernaturalism, for it is to be noted that no agency of God is mentioned in the sentence of verse 3.

It is rather an emotive articulation of abhorrence that assumes and affirms that creation in all its parts is deeply connected to the rule of Yahweh, so that the economic violation leads to the environmental disaster. The emotive quality of the words aims to appeal to the emotive sensibility of the listening community and so to penetrate the cynical numbness of those who wished the economy were autonomous but who, in deep ways, know better.

Reading Hosea in the age of climate change

Who would have known that violation of the Ten Commandments would lead to the failure of creation? Well, Hosea would know that! The “therefore” is an ominous recognition that human choices determine future prospects. The human choices, so Hosea attests, have not been good; for that reason the future of creation cannot be good either.

We now hear Hosea’s poetic utterance at a great chronological, cultural distance. We read it in a public context that evokes a dispute about “protecting the environment” and “maintaining a growth economy.” We read it in the context of a supposed scientific dispute about global warming, though the scientific evidence for global warming is not much disputed any more.

It is the case that our scientific knowledge fills in the prophetic “therefore” to show that economic exploitation in the interest of growth, surplus, and a higher standard of living by fracking, cutting down rain forests, and increasing fossil fuel for the urban elite and those who replicate the urban elite cannot be separated from the environmental reality.

The final word of the poem, “perishing,” may ring in our ears. We watch the environmental crisis as the Arctic ice melts, as the butterflies disappear due to chemical poisoning of their sources of food, as drought crowds out arable land, as old modes of extravagant living becomes less and less sustainable, as elephant herds are decimated because their tusks are tradable commodities. Not all of this is new; what is new is the scale of exploitation required by a new scale of predatory greed. A high standard of living based on extraction insists that all else (including cheap labor) must be regarded as dispensable commodities. Without such scientific data, Hosea already judged such community-destroying greed to be unsustainable.

We may now ponder the poetic “therefore.” We may do so with a grain of salt about “supernatural” agency. We do not believe that God would swoop in and punish. Nor did Hosea! But Hosea did believe that there is a mysterious presence of holiness that sets limits on human choices that violate God’s purposes only at great cost.

It may be inevitable that we try to adjudicate and negotiate the environmental crisis in a “reasonable fashion,” according to our best scientific and economic knowledge. All that may be to the good. But this great issue needs to be framed in recognition of this holy mystery that makes both human freedom and its offspring of acquisitive greed quite penultimate. In light of that inscrutable limit that cannot be disregarded, we are no longer permitted to imagine an acquisitive economy as *choosable*, as though there were no long-term payback, as though there were no “therefore.”

Hosea understood that cynical exploitation of the neighborhood, local or global, cannot finally outflank the divine “therefore.” ■

Walter Brueggemann, a Sojourners contributing editor, is professor emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Ga.

Twelve Years for a Paintbrush

**We can't understand race in America today without
understanding prisons.**

by JONATHAN WILSON-HARTGROVE

EARLY ONE SUNDAY MORNING, I drive to the Durham Correctional Center to pick up Greg. He's spent the past 16 months at a state prison down east, working overtime in the kitchen so he could get out six weeks early. A few days ago, the Department of Corrections transferred him to this local minimum-security facility. Greg knows the place well. He's walked out of here more times than he can count.

"Feel good to be out?" I ask as we walk through the gate of the chain-link fence, nodding goodbye to the guards. "You know it does," Greg says, his back straight and his eyes fixed on the horizon. He's relishing this taste of freedom.



Some of them have done terrible things; they are not

But Greg knows this pleasure is fleeting. As good as it might feel to walk through the gate and hop in a car, leaving prison doesn't mean you get to leave this part of your life behind.

According to the Prison Policy Initiative, more than 2.4 million Americans are locked behind bars (and 12 million cycle through local jails *each year*). At any given time, some 6 million Americans are caught up in the criminal justice system—if not behind bars, then checking in with a parole officer who can carry them back to jail for the smallest of transgressions. Like Greg, a disproportionate number of those impacted by the U.S. criminal justice system are African American.

Even if you walk out of the gate like Greg, time served, you still have to deal with the debts that ruined your credit while you were locked away. You still have to rebuild relationships that were cut off because you spent the past decade behind bars. You still have to check the box on almost every job application that says you're a convicted felon.

I live in a home named Rutba House, where we have opened our doors to friends like Greg who are coming home from prison. Doing so has helped me see that our country's original sin of race-based slavery has shifted its shape again in the 21st century. As the Black Lives Matter movement has tried to make clear on America's streets, race still matters. But in light of the fact that African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of whites, we cannot understand race in America today without understanding prisons.

Knowing begins to change us

Befriending people on their way out of prison turns out to be its own way in. "Recidivism" is the official label given to the tendency of people who've been in prison to end up there again. Most efforts to curb this tide focus on helping individuals make better choices. When Greg gets arrested for stealing a paintbrush one night, I'm ticked off. *Why the heck would he steal a paintbrush?*

But recidivism is about more than foolish choices. There are plenty of places where taking a neighbor's paintbrush when you've had too much to drink isn't going to land you in jail. When we get Greg's first letter, he tells us he's facing 12 years as a "repeat offender." *Twelve years for a paintbrush?*

Of course, no one who wrote the mandatory minimum laws that would put away someone like Greg was thinking about his situation. Both Republicans and Democrats used "tough on crime" language through the 1980s and '90s to persuade voters that they were making America safer. What they did not account for, however, was the long-term impact of those laws on places where addiction is a public health epidemic and poverty leaves folks with fewer and fewer options.

Given our nation's history of racial division, it can be easy for white people to assume that more black people are caught up in the criminal justice system because more black people commit crimes. But it is hard to write off a whole race of people as "criminal" when you get to know them. Living with people caught up in our broken criminal justice system at Rutba House opens my eyes to disparities in opportunity, education, police enforcement, and sentencing. "Man, if they can't call you [the n-word], they'll call you an ex-con," one frustrated young man says. The worst thing about prison, it seems, is the way it disproportionately affects the poor and people of color, marking them as something less than humans created in God's image.

It's not a single relationship—no one particular incident—but rather the cumulative effect of knowing those who've been to prison that begins to change us. Whatever abstract thoughts any of us had about prison have been exchanged for the stories of people who've eaten at our table and vacationed with our families. Yes, they can be frustrating and annoying. Some of them have done terrible things, and as much as they regret them, if put in the same situation they might well do them again. They are not angels. But they are people.

My night in jail

And, occasionally, they are angels after all—at least the Book of Hebrews says those who extend hospitality sometimes entertain angels unawares. Jesus said that when we visit those in prison, we are visiting him. Hard as it is sometimes, we try to see Jesus in those we welcome at Rutba House.

And our state is killing people not unlike them.

When we read in the newspaper that

an execution is scheduled for early Friday morning, some of us drive over and join a little crowd that's gathered outside to pray. We do this a few times before we realize that this is happening every other week.

The stories of those who are being killed are not unlike stories we've heard around the dinner table at Rutba House. Only, these stories of poverty, abuse, and suffering have ended in violent tragedy. These men have been convicted of murder. Anyone could understand why their victims' family members would want them dead. But the reality of this Southern state is not simply that people who take a life face execution. Most murderers are not sentenced to death. The terrible truth we have to face is that in a place where black people once faced the pseudo-justice of lynch mobs, poor and black people who are accused of killing their white neighbors are the people who end up on death row.

According to the Death Penalty Information Center, the number one indicator of whether a defendant will receive the death penalty is the race of their victim. What's more, the work of North Carolina's Innocence Inquiry Commission has shown that roughly 1 in 25 of those on our death row was wrongfully convicted.

Yet they are still being killed in our name. So one year, as the season of Lent begins, we decide this is one sin that we must confess. When we receive our ashes on Ash Wednesday, everyone at Rutba House also pins onto our shirts a scarlet letter "I" for idolatry. We wear the I for 40 days, explaining to anyone who asks why we've come to believe that the application of the death penalty in North Carolina is so unjust that it amounts to an idolatrous practice of playing God.

When we nonviolently block the prison driveway during a scheduled execution, the local authorities decide they've had enough. After they photograph and fingerprint us, they send us to a magistrate who says we're each being held under a \$5,000 bond. An officer escorts me to a cell with a window through which I'm handed a large plastic bag to store my clothes, an orange jumpsuit, boxers, and flip-flops. He stands guard while I change, then walks me to a large holding cell where I join about a dozen other men who have been arrested that night.

angels. But they are people.

The corners of this 12-by-12-foot room are taken by men who are trying to get a little sleep, propped on the wooden benches against the cinderblock walls. I can't imagine sleeping beneath these fluorescent lights, but I guess if you're tired enough you can sleep most anywhere. I find an open spot in the middle of a bench, my back against the wall, and watch a man in his mid-20s across from me who's detoxing, his head between his knees, his body convulsing. A guard brings him some BC Powder pain reliever, which he snorts like a line of cocaine off the wrapping paper. His head drops again, and I watch the drool drip from his mouth to the floor.

When I'm finally sent upstairs to a cell block several hours later, the guard walks

block. I feel like I'm in the gym at my neighborhood rec center, only no one is exercising on the track, and the court is littered with tables, chairs, and sleep mats.

When I find a spot in a corner for mine, the guy next to me looks me up and down and asks, "What the hell you doing here?" I tell him about the execution the night before—how some of us had knelt down and tried to block the door. He immediately stands up. "Hey, y'all ain't gonna believe this," he shouts, then proceeds to give a one-sentence summary of our action to the cell block, enhanced with three expletives. I happen to have sat down beside the block's unofficial leader. He decides to lead an all-block rap session on executions and the criminal justice system.

Relocating education

After I'm bailed out and return home, I realize that I keep talking about the education I got on that cell block. We need more spaces like that, I say. We need to help people get into prison—to see society from behind the bars, to know people there as fellow human beings. I say it over and over again, not sure exactly what I mean.

I ask Sarah Jobe at Rutba House if she'd like to do something with this prison-based education idea. She runs with it. Pretty soon she has graduate-level courses taught by Duke Divinity School faculty running inside one federal and three state facilities. Project TURN, she calls it, for "Transform, Unlock, ReNew." Half of each class consists of students who are incarcerated; the other half is



Franklin Golden

The author leads a discussion at a prison in North Carolina as part of Project TURN, which stands for "Transform, Unlock, ReNew."

me into a room where I'm issued a multi-colored tri-fold mat, similar to the one I used for naptime in kindergarten. Due to overcrowding, the officer tells me, this mat is my bunk. "Find a spot on the floor in the common area. Whenever we call count, make sure you're on it."

I step onto the block, a small courtyard surrounded by double-occupancy cells stacked two stories high. A set of stairs stands halfway down the courtyard on the left, leading up to a catwalk that circles the

"Look around this room," he says to me, his eyes both earnest and angry. "I knew every guy in this place before we ever got here. We're all from the same zip code," he says, pointing a finger. "The train that ends at death row starts here." He is looking at me. He knows I won't be here long. But if I'm going to take anything out of here, he wants to make sure I know this: A young black man who grows up like he did knows in his gut that he's caught up in a system that's marked him for death.

students from outside the facility. For everyone, the experience is about what the apostle Paul called the renewing of our minds.

Thousands of religious volunteers come into prisons in America each year, many of them offering services that would not otherwise be provided. But Project TURN students are crossing a line that almost no one has an opportunity to cross, in or outside of prison. They are sitting down as equals to learn with peers who have been locked away from the rest of society.

The death penalty in North Carolina is so unjust that it amounts to an idolatrous practice of playing God.

They are learning not only that race still matters, but also that it's difficult for "color-blind" Americans who have little firsthand experience with the criminal justice system to see. As evangelical legal scholar William Stuntz wrote, "Among the great untold stories of our time is this one: The last half of the 20th century saw America's criminal justice system unravel." Here in the South, where most TURN students grew up, Stuntz's analysis of the racial dynamics of incarceration is especially pointed. In his *The Collapse of the American Criminal Justice System*, Stuntz notes that the black inmate population was seven times higher in 2000 than in 1970, a rate that "exceeds by one-fourth the imprisonment rate in the Soviet Union in 1950—near the end of Stalin's reign."

When you're sitting in class with someone from a very different background, hearing their story and learning from their insights, it's hard to imagine that Gulag-like segregation is really the answer to our problem.

For students who read the Bible, it doesn't take long to see that prisons present a theological problem.

Take Paul's words in Philippians 1:14 for example: "Because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear." People who are incarcerated immediately recognize that Paul is claiming chains—so often a symbol of shame—as a badge of honor. He is turning a system designed to condemn on its head. People in prison do this all the time. When they do, they help all of us understand the language of the New Testament.

John, a young white man who attended a Christian college and majored in religious studies before coming to seminary, confessed after a Project TURN class on epistles from prison that he wasn't sure he had fully understood the message of the New Testament before reading it behind bars. "Sure, I knew the words. I'd memorized many of them. But these guys helped me see how the gospel has power to change lives. It

makes me believe it can even change mine."

"We're just the ones who got caught."

Dear to evangelicals for generations, the doctrine of "justification by faith" often loses its force because it is intellectualized. Pastors challenge their flocks to first imagine sin as an offense against a just God, then to conceptualize the impossibility of ever making up for this offense ourselves. The great challenge, as every pastor knows, is to help people feel this problem in their bones.

But prison is a place where the need for justification is immediate. "We aren't



**Project TURN
director
Louis Threatt
speaking to a
community
group.**

the only ones who've broken the law," one incarcerated student says with a wry smile. "We're just the ones who got caught." Having worked to defend themselves in courts of limited justice, prisoners know how impossible it can feel to justify yourself according to the law. But the good news of the gospel is that there is hope beyond demonstrating our innocence in court. There is, in fact, One we can trust to save us apart from the law.

Which continues to give me hope that, despite the grave injustices of our nation, the answer to our predicament may lie with those who've been locked away. "The stone that the builder rejected," the psalmist tells us, "has become the capstone." When we have the faith to trust this truth, Project TURN keeps showing us that it can, indeed, be "wonderful in our eyes." ■

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is co-founder of *Rutba House*, director of *School for Conversion*, and author, with Rev. William J. Barber II, of the forthcoming *The Third Reconstruction* (Beacon Press, January 2016).

LOVING OTHERS THROUGH EQUAL EDUCATION.



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Redefining 'Fruitful'

**Married couples who decide not to become parents
find fresh ways to embrace a vocation
of family and hospitality.**

by **ELLEN PAINTER DOLLAR**

IN MY 20s, I came to the unsettling conclusion that God was calling me to have a baby. Familiar with Frederick Buechner's declaration that vocation "is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet," I believed that my visceral yearning for children pointed toward my deep gladness. How my desire for children would meet the world's great need, however, was far from clear, particularly in my small urban church where people routinely made great sacrifices in response to poverty and injustice.

In my progressive circles, childbearing can also be cast as ethically questionable, contributing to overpopulation and environmental degradation. In 2006, Katharine Jefferts Schori, then the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, summed up this view when she told an interviewer that "Episcopalians tend to be better-educated and tend to reproduce at lower rates than some other denominations. ... We encourage people to pay attention to the stewardship of the earth and not use more than their portion." More crudely, proponents of a growing "childfree" movement dismissed parents as self-absorbed "breeders."

I was also leery of claiming a call to motherhood because within some strains of Christianity, a woman's vocation to motherhood is assumed, regardless of her circumstances or predilections. Many evangelical and Catholic Christians uphold the traditional nuclear family of husband, wife,



The term “childfree” conjures similar terms, such as “smoke-free” or “fat-free,” that connote rejection of something dangerous or unpleasant.

‘We do family differently now.’

Redefining family and fruitfulness

The term “childfree” conjures similar terms, such as “smoke-free”

or “fat-free,” that connote rejection of something dangerous or unpleasant. But often those who choose to remain childless do so from within a positive framework, affirming fresh ways of defining family and fruitfulness, rather than a negative framework in which they escape the “burden” of children.

Writer Erin Lane “never dreamed of having babies the way other women did. I knew I wanted something different from a traditional nuclear family.” In their 10 years of marriage, she and her husband have engaged in what she terms a “ministry of availability.” Without children, they have the flexibility to step in to babysit when friends need a night out, or to volunteer at the last minute. They are now preparing to welcome foster children into their home.

“It has become important to frame our decision to be childless as a positive thing,” Lane explains, “as an affirmation of the value of relating to children in different ways. We also want to be clear that we’re not taking in foster kids to be brave and noble. We’re doing it because we want to.” She goes on, “I do very much want to be in relationship with children. The incarnation—God coming to us in the form of a baby—gives us an upside-down vision of the wisdom we can discover in vulnerability. Children, so in touch with their own neediness, can help us embrace our own.”

Kat Benson, who requested a pseudonym because of the sensitive nature of childbearing decisions, likewise casts her childlessness as making room for other kinds of fruitfulness. “My husband and I are both called to the life of an artist, to creating things through art. We’re both also very nurturing people,” Benson says. “Through our acting classes and other creative projects, we nurture and mentor so many people. It’s a whole other way to influence the world.”

Having no children has led Benson to rich alternative experiences of familial relationships. “For example,” she recounts, “for a time I made weekly visits to New York City for career reasons and stayed with a

and children as the God-ordained bedrock of society and the church. Writing for the Family Research Council, Dr. Andreas J. Kostenberger of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary writes, “The Bible defines ‘family’ in a narrow sense as *the union of one man and one woman in matrimony which is normally blessed with one or several natural or adopted children*” (emphasis in original). I feared that by claiming motherhood as my vocation, I might inadvertently support a limited vision that idolizes traditional families and sees childbearing as every woman’s primary calling.

Even Pope Francis has harsh words for those who choose not to procreate. As reported by the Catholic News Service in June 2014, Pope Francis stated that among “things Jesus doesn’t like” are married couples “who don’t want children, who want to be without fruitfulness.” Such couples are convinced, he argued, that by remaining childless they “can see the world, be on vacation ... have a fancy home in the country ... be carefree.” He warned that such couples are doomed to a bitter, lonely old age. The stereotype of childless adults as embittered hedonists is so widespread that writer Meghan Daum titled her recent anthology of essays by childless writers *Selfish, Shallow, and Self-Absorbed*.

Recent biblical scholarship and the witness of childless Christians, however, provide a refreshing counterpoint to extreme voices from both left and right that misconstrue the biblical narrative and what motivates those who choose to remain childless.

A biblical view of family and procreation

In their recent book *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton University Press), Candida R. Moss of the University of Notre Dame and Joel S. Baden of Yale Divinity School challenge traditional interpretations that privilege procreation as a divinely mandated endeavor for everyone.

Moss and Baden argue, for example, that the command to “be fruitful and multiply” is about the establishment of a people, not unlimited procreation for individuals. “The blessing to be fruitful and multiply is not given to all humans for all time,” Baden told me in an interview. “It is bound to its context.”

Moss and Baden parse scriptures

concerned with procreation—the curse upon Eve to know pain in childbirth, matriarchal infertility stories, Paul’s views on celibacy and marriage, and hints of the afterlife—to argue that bearing children is simply not mandated as a central endeavor for God’s people, now or in the world to come. Furthermore, they argue that the New Testament fosters a radical view of family that is, in their words, “malleable and expansive.”

Stories about Jesus’ birth and early years provide a dynamic model of family that is not based on biology. Baden explained that, “given the circumstances of Jesus’ birth—that he was raised by Joseph who was essentially an adoptive father, and that Mary served as a surrogate for a child conceived outside of normal reproductive processes—and Jesus’ later statements that undermined familial obligations, it is difficult to sustain a view that the gospels privilege biological parenthood and ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ modes of procreation.”

Jesus challenged the primacy of biological kinship in word and deed, as when he forbade a follower from burying his father (Matthew 8:22), and in another instance, after asking “Who is my mother and who are my brothers?” declared that “Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:48-50). John’s gospel includes a scene in which Jesus, hanging on the cross, instructs the “disciple whom he loved” and Jesus’ mother Mary to treat one another as family. Moss and Baden argue that Jesus thereby “unshackles familial ties from biological foundations.”

Pauline theology also undermines the primacy of biological family by privileging celibacy over marriage, and values marriage more for controlling sexuality than for procreation. Moss and Baden argue that Paul, like Jesus, emphasizes the creation of a “fraternal community” and “proposes a model of family and union with God that exists outside of the structures of biological procreation.”

As Baden summarized, “In the gospels and the early church, where we might expect to find an interest in biological offspring, we find instead an emphasis on fostering a family of believers. Jesus was essentially saying,

friend who was going through a difficult time. It turns out I was exactly the person she needed. I had the flexibility to make a long-term commitment to a friend for whom I could act as family when she desperately needed support. I could have never done that with children at home.”

“My own family has been very complicated and difficult,” Benson continues. “I’ve come to see family in a much broader way. I love my family, but I’ve learned to look elsewhere, to friends who serve as family for me, to get some needs met in a way I can’t in my own family. There’s so much freedom in that. The point of all of this is love—learning to love and accept your family members, what you and they can and cannot do.”

While infertility is a very different experience than chosen childlessness, redefining what it means to live a fruitful life can bring a measure of healing for infertile couples. As Karen Swallow Prior wrote in a 2014 piece for *Christianity Today* about her infertility, “That term, *infertile*, may be medically and technically appropriate, but it’s not a word I would use to describe my life.”

The call to childlessness

Just as I frame my childbearing decisions as vocational, the childless Christians I spoke to say their decision arose from desire coupled with a sense of vocation.

“When I start to notice that things about me don’t really fit with what other people are doing and thinking,” explains Lane, “that’s a hint that I might be looking at a calling from God. I began to notice that I didn’t have a deep desire for children, and also that being childless would enable us to support other families and children in particular ways. We are available to respond to the community’s needs in a way that parents often cannot be.”

Benson explains that, “I have never had a desire for my own children. But it’s more than just a lack of desire. I am certain that having kids is not what I was meant to do on earth. I can intellectually put reasons around my reaction, but my bottom line is a visceral feeling that this was not my calling.”

Commenting on the increasing social acceptability of childlessness, Lane emphasizes that, “Culturally, we’re in a place where we think it’s no one’s business what we do with our bodies and our lives. That’s just not true, particularly for Christians who have an

allegiance to God and our faith communities. I want to frame this decision more as a positive thing affirming a different way of being fruitful in the world.” Reproductive decisions are personal, but not necessarily private; they are intimate, but not irrelevant to the common good.

As people who believe that all are made in God’s image, and in a God who defied cultural norms to welcome children, Christians must affirm the inherent goodness of children, rejecting the cynicism that dismisses children as little consumers gobbling up the world’s resources.

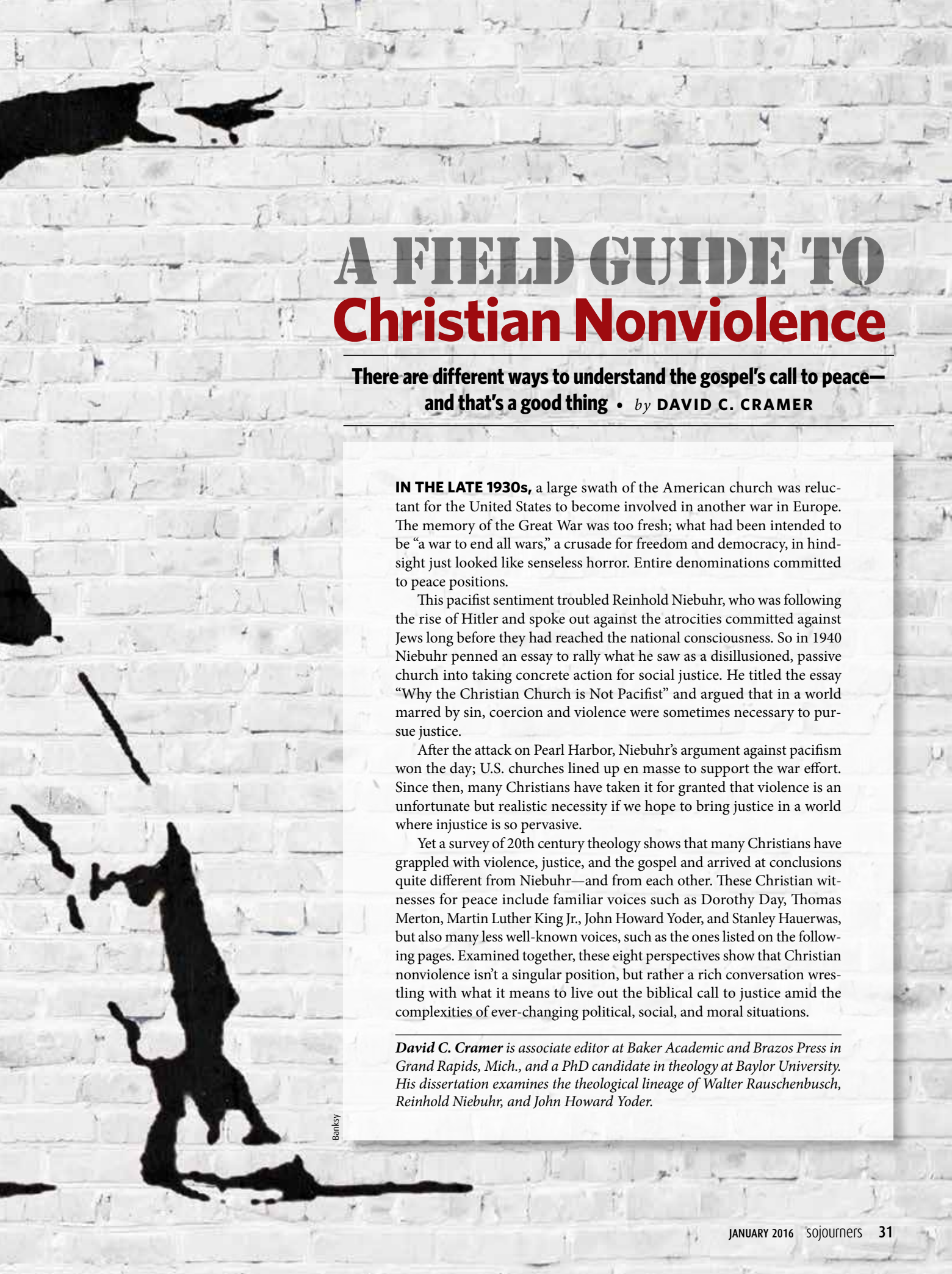
Likewise, we must push back against what Dale Martin, in his book *Sex and the Single Savior*, calls the “idolatry” of “American churches [that] have so identified themselves with the modern, heterosexual, nuclear family that people without such families feel less at home in most churches.” Martin argues, as Moss and Baden do, that the biblical narrative simply does not support the popular notion that nuclear families centered on procreation constitute God’s preferred model for human life. Instead, Martin argues, “there are many more resources in Christian scripture and tradition to *criticize* the modern family than to promote it.” Martin suggests that God invites us to “retrain our imaginations both to see the inherent evils in the modern idolatry of marriage and family and to develop visions of alternative, eschatological, forward-looking communities.”

Raising my three children, whose chatter and clutter daily challenge my craving for quiet and order, has taught me far more than any charitable endeavor about what radical hospitality and love look like. For other Christians, childlessness allows for transformative experiences that are only possible because they aren’t raising children. A “malleable and expansive” biblical vision of family invites us to end our preoccupation with forces accused of undermining Christian family values, and instead rejoice in and support the many ways that God calls us to live fruitful lives. ■

Ellen Painter Dollar writes about faith, family, disability, and ethics for *Patheos* and elsewhere. She is the author of *No Easy Choice: A Story of Disability, Parenthood, and Faith in an Age of Advanced Reproduction* (Westminster John Knox).







A FIELD GUIDE TO Christian Nonviolence

There are different ways to understand the gospel's call to peace—
and that's a good thing • by DAVID C. CRAMER

IN THE LATE 1930s, a large swath of the American church was reluctant for the United States to become involved in another war in Europe. The memory of the Great War was too fresh; what had been intended to be “a war to end all wars,” a crusade for freedom and democracy, in hindsight just looked like senseless horror. Entire denominations committed to peace positions.

This pacifist sentiment troubled Reinhold Niebuhr, who was following the rise of Hitler and spoke out against the atrocities committed against Jews long before they had reached the national consciousness. So in 1940 Niebuhr penned an essay to rally what he saw as a disillusioned, passive church into taking concrete action for social justice. He titled the essay “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist” and argued that in a world marred by sin, coercion and violence were sometimes necessary to pursue justice.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Niebuhr's argument against pacifism won the day; U.S. churches lined up en masse to support the war effort. Since then, many Christians have taken it for granted that violence is an unfortunate but realistic necessity if we hope to bring justice in a world where injustice is so pervasive.

Yet a survey of 20th century theology shows that many Christians have grappled with violence, justice, and the gospel and arrived at conclusions quite different from Niebuhr—and from each other. These Christian witnesses for peace include familiar voices such as Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King Jr., John Howard Yoder, and Stanley Hauerwas, but also many less well-known voices, such as the ones listed on the following pages. Examined together, these eight perspectives show that Christian nonviolence isn't a singular position, but rather a rich conversation wrestling with what it means to live out the biblical call to justice amid the complexities of ever-changing political, social, and moral situations.

David C. Cramer is associate editor at Baker Academic and Brazos Press in Grand Rapids, Mich., and a PhD candidate in theology at Baylor University. His dissertation examines the theological lineage of Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and John Howard Yoder.

Banksy



'Realist' Nonviolence

Walter Rauschenbusch

1861-1918

A BAPTIST THEOLOGIAN born to German parents in Rochester, N.Y., Rauschenbusch is best known for popularizing the "social gospel," a movement among mainline Protestants that believed Christianity should address the social evils of the industrial age. Yet when he protested

KEY WORK:

A Theology for the Social Gospel (1917)

the U.S. entrance into World War I, Rauschenbusch was deserted by many of his liberal minister friends. Although

Rauschenbusch believed violence was incompatible with Jesus' teaching, his protest of the war was based more on his conclusion that national leaders used idealistic rhetoric to mask their true financial motivations for going to war. "This war trade is not for patriotism but for profit," wrote Rauschenbusch in "Private Profit and the Nation's Honor," a co-authored open letter that named specific U.S. corporations profiting from the war. "Capitalism has often sacrificed the higher values of humanity to make big profits."

Rauschenbusch's revulsion to the war involved a number of factors, including concern for his German relatives; yet, by the time of his death, his anti-war stance was rigorous. In 1916, he joined the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a newly formed Christian peace organization (which is now interfaith), and in his most enduring work, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, he wrote that "governments have in the past waged war for dynastic and class interests without consulting the people." Thus, while Niebuhr appeals to the reality of sinfulness to *justify* war, Rauschenbusch cites the reality of human sin as a primary reason to *oppose* war: Though leaders might appeal to "higher values of humanity" to justify war, he explains, the temptation of power and money means that upholding these values is rarely the real motivation—or outcome—of war.



The Nonviolence of the Disinherited

Howard Thurman

1899-1981

HOWARD THURMAN is best known as a leader of the civil rights movement and a personal mentor to Martin Luther King Jr. Ordained a Baptist minister in 1925, Thurman became the first black board member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, founder and co-pastor of the first major interracial church

KEY WORK:

Jesus and the Disinherited (1949)

in the United States, and a personal friend of Mohandas Gandhi. Yet Thurman never forgot the stories of slavery that his grandmother—herself a former slave—taught him as a child.

Whereas Rauschenbusch's pacifism is rooted in his analysis of those in power, in *Jesus and the Disinherited* Thurman advocates nonviolence as a strategy of survival for the powerless. The oppressed, explains Thurman, have developed a number of survival mechanisms, including fear, deception, and hatred toward their oppressors. While these techniques work in the short run, they ultimately dehumanize the oppressed and thus play into the goals of the oppressors.

Thurman argues that "the religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: 'Love your enemy. Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it.'" For Thurman, Jesus' message of nonviolent enemy love is not only moral, but pragmatic—the most effective tool available to the oppressed for confronting and reconciling with their oppressors.



The Nonviolence of Christian Discipleship

André and Magda Trocmé

1901-1971, 1901-1996

ANDRÉ AND MAGDA TROCMÉ were designated by Israel's Yad Vashem as "Righteous among the Nations" for their heroic resistance to the Vichy regime and the Nazis during World War II. Under the leadership of the Trocmés, the French Reformed Church that André pastored established

KEY WORK:
Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution
(1961)

safe houses to hide Jews and other refugees. When André was threatened by the Vichy government for not turning over Jews—numbering in the thousands—he responded, "We do not know what a Jew is; we only know people."

In *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*, André explains that Jesus could have aligned with any of the competing political approaches of his day: the collaborators (Herodians, Sadducees), the isolationists (Essenes, Pharisees), or the resistance (Zealots). Jesus was most tempted by the Zealot option, argues Trocmé, so that "it was only after an intense inner struggle, after the genuine moral agony at Gethsemane, that Jesus finally rejected resorting to violence." But Jesus also rejected isolationism, pointed out Trocmé. Instead, "Jesus actually engaged in a kind of civil disobedience, whereby he and his disciples systematically violated those traditions that only helped to oppress the people." Jesus' death on the cross offers a model for a third way between withdrawal and violent resistance, a model that Christians are called to emulate—as the Trocmés did with their own lives.



Liberationist Nonviolence

Hélder Câmara

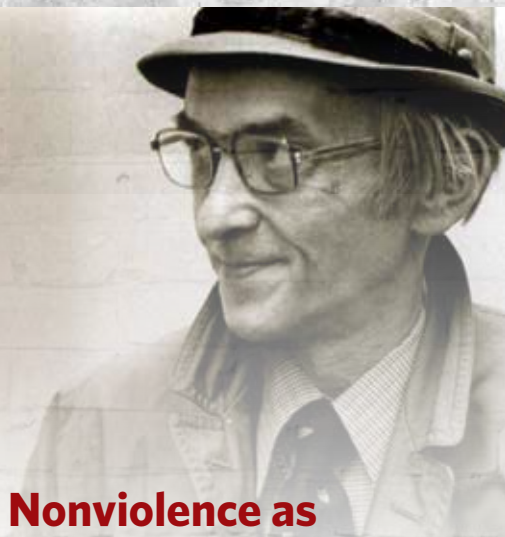
1909-1999

HÉLDER CÂMARA is known as the "bishop of the slums" for his work among the poor of Brazil as an auxiliary bishop, and later, archbishop, during Brazil's brutal—U.S. supported—military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. Although Dom Hélder did not consider himself a radical, he was viewed as

KEY WORK:
Spiral of Violence
(1971)

such by the government and at times by his own Catholic Church for speaking on behalf of the oppressed. Nevertheless, Câmara became a key voice in the then-burgeoning Latin American liberation theology movement. In 2015, the Vatican granted permission to begin the process that could lead to Câmara's beatification and canonization.

Câmara's short book *Spiral of Violence* is dedicated to the memory of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Câmara describes three kinds of violence: the established violence of injustice (violence No. 1), violent revolt of the oppressed or youth fighting for a more just world (violence No. 2), and the repressive violence of governmental authorities to quell revolution (violence No. 3). Although Câmara does not condemn those who are compelled to respond to oppression with violent revolt, he argues that doing so only perpetuates the spiral of violence and that "the only true answer to violence is to have the courage to face the injustices which constitute violence No. 1." Unlike Trocmé, who explicitly contrasted the religiously motivated nonviolence of the Christian disciple with the secular nonviolent techniques of Gandhi, Câmara endorses Gandhi as a "prophet" who broke the cycle of violence by utilizing "liberating moral pressure."



Nonviolence as Resistance to Death

William Stringfellow

1928-1985

WILLIAM STRINGFELLOW was recently described by theologian Myles Werntz as “one of the most enigmatic theologians of his generation” who was “read widely in his own day but largely neglected in our own.” A lawyer by training and a self-studied lay theologian with a tenuous

KEY WORK:

An Ethic for Christians & Other Aliens in a Strange Land (1973)

relationship with the Episcopal Church, Stringfellow addressed some of the major moral issues of his day—racism, sexism, poverty, capitalism, war—with theological creativity, incisive political analysis, and tireless activism.

Whereas the Trocmés derived their nonviolent theology from the gospels, Stringfellow’s nonviolent theology derives largely from the apostle Paul’s language of the “principalities and powers” as well as from the book of Revelation. In his polemical work *An Ethic for Christians & Other Aliens in a Strange Land*, Stringfellow describes U.S. society as inextricably committed to ideologies of death, a society like Babylon that does not merely commit acts of violence but “*is* violence.” Thus, Stringfellow argues that Christians should not try to save America but rather live a life of resistance to its culture of violence. Citing the case of Bonhoeffer, Stringfellow, like Câmara, does not rule out the possibility of violent resistance, but argues that Christian resistance comes through practicing the nonviolent gifts of the Spirit: speaking the truth, living humanly, and thereby exposing and rebuking the powers of death.



Nonviolence of Mystical Radicalism

Dorothee Sölle

1929-2003

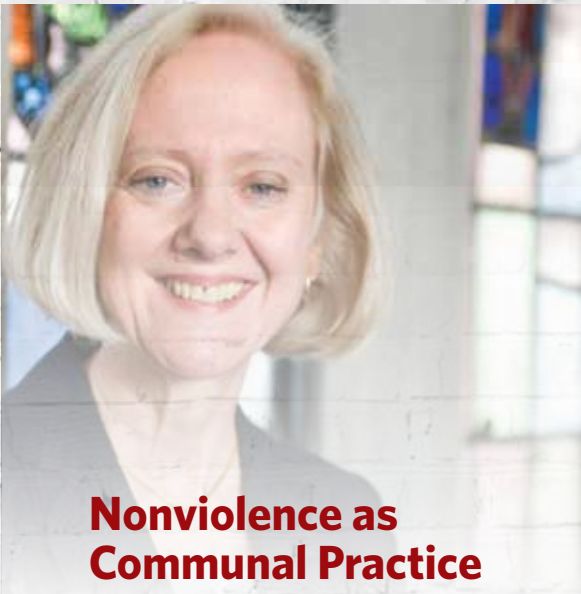
DOROTHEE SÖLLE was a German Protestant theologian, poet, activist, and later liberationist, feminist, and mystic. During World War II, her family hid a Jewish friend in their attic for six weeks, and Sölle’s early work marked an attempt at post-Auschwitz theology, rejecting traditional

KEY WORK:

The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance (1997)

concepts of divine omnipotence in favor of a God who suffers with humanity. In 1975, Sölle accepted an appointment at Union Theological Seminary in New York where she controversially referred to the policies of the 1980s Religious Right as “Christofascism.”

Sölle was every bit as radical in her resistance as Stringfellow, but as she writes in her magnum opus, *The Silent Cry*, her nonviolent theology was rooted in the deep tradition of Christian mysticism, including her contemporaries Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Thurman, and King. “To exist free of violence,” she writes, “means to think and act with other living beings in a common life. ... It is the mysticism of being at one with all that lives.” Such mysticism does not deny the existence of evil or enemies, but it does acknowledge that the difference between oneself and one’s enemies is not absolute—and certainly not absolute enough to justify their destruction.



Nonviolence as Communal Practice

Lisa Sowle Cahill

1948-

LISA SOWLE CAHILL is the J. Donald Monan Professor of Theology at Boston College. A Catholic moral theologian, Cahill has written widely on contemporary social issues, especially bioethics and the ethics of sex and gender, having served as president of both the Society of Christian Ethics and the Catholic Theological Society of America.

KEY WORK:

Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory (1994)

In *Love Your Enemies*, Cahill traces the historical development of Christian pacifism and just war theory, arguing that these two traditions operate

according to different logics. While Christian pacifism and just war theory both wrestle with the “problem of reconciling Christian discipleship with public responsibility” and share a presumption against violence, Cahill argues that just war theory tends to function according to a rules-based approach, and its advocates sometimes accuse pacifists of refusing to make any exceptions to the rule against taking life. In Cahill’s account, however, pacifism is not based on rules but on “the simple conviction that violence is just not consistent with the sort of person Jesus is or the life he lived, a life the discipleship community shares.” As with the Trocmés and Stringfellow, so too for Cahill, “the nonviolence of the kingdom of Jesus is not presented in the Bible as an absolute ethical system, but as a calling, as conversion, and even as beatitude.” While just war theory may have some usefulness in guiding wider society, concedes Cahill, nonviolence is the natural outflowing of an alternative Christian society with communal practices of mercy, compassion, and empathy.



Resistance to Intimate and Societal Violence

Traci C. West

1959-

A PROFESSOR OF ethics and African-American studies at Drew University Theological School in Madison, N.J., Traci C. West is also an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church and a member of United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church. She writes frequently on issues

KEY WORK:

Wounds of the Spirit: Black Women, Violence, and Resistance Ethics (1999)

related to race, gender, sexuality, marriage equality, and violence against women.

In *Wounds of the Spirit*, West offers a challenge to Christian ethicists, especially those who write on violence: “We must measure

Christian ethics by the extent to which its rhetoric on violence is applicable to the circumstances of women’s lives. This is the proper test of the viability and adequacy of its moral prescriptions.” Thus, instead of beginning with issues of pacifism and just war or questions of geopolitical violence, West begins with the experiences of women of color and the issues of intimate and societal violence. And rather than advocating nonviolence per se, West calls for the development of “an ethic of resisting violence against women.” Such resistance, argues West, might take a multitude of individual and communal forms, including the encouragement of female defiance, the creation of rituals within the church that denounce male violence and domination, and the investment of political energy toward public disavowal of “the varied expressions of white supremacy, male dominance, and intimate violence.” The latter would entail confronting “the deceit and greed” of “the United States and its Western European allies” whose “life-threatening practices” are especially lethal to the poor in other parts of the world—an approach similar to the nonviolent realism of Rauschenbusch, though with an entirely different starting point. ■

THE BEATITUDES

Sojourners invited some of our favorite contemporary authors—religious and otherwise—to offer their reflections on the beatitudes. Fifth in a series.

"Blessed are
the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven."
—Matthew 5:3

The Final Frontier

You either walk toward love or away from it with every breath you draw.

by BRIAN DOYLE

IT IS THE RARE SOUL who remembers particular lines from scripture for reasons other than professional advancement or private absorption, but I remember even as a child being totally riveted by the odder blunter saltier lines in *The Greatest Story Ever Told*—the ones that made me elbow my wry patient dad, like *be kind to your father even when his mind goes*, or the ones where the Christos isn't so much god-like as he is a rattled guy, such as when he whirls and shouts *who touched my clothes?!*, after he *felt the power leave him*, what a phrase!

And one of those lines for me has always been *blessed are the poor in spirit*. I heard that for the first time as a child, of course, at Mass, late in the morning, drowsing between my alpine dad and willowy mother, in a pew filled with brothers seated with parental buffers so as to reduce fisticuffery, and like everyone else I was puzzled and nonplussed; wasn't the whole point to be *rich* in spirit? How could you be bereft spirit-wise, but get a backstage pass to the kingdom of heaven? What was *that* all about? Was that a major serious printer's error no one had noticed all these years? Was it supposed to be *pear* in spirit, or something artsy like that?

Diligent schoolteachers subsequently explained it to me, and my gentle wise parents explained it, and learned university professors explained it, and able scholarly writers explained it, and I got the general idea, that the word *poor* there is better understood as *humble*, but *humble* never really registered for me, because I was not humble, and had no real concept

of humble, until my wife married me, which taught me a shocking amount about humility, and then we were graced by children, which taught me *a stunning* amount about humility, and then friends of mine began to wither and shrivel and die in all sorts of ways, including being roasted to death on Sept. 11, and I began, slowly and dimly, to realize that humble was the only finally truly honest way to be, in this life; anything else is ultimately cocky, which is either foolish or a deliberate disguise you refuse to remove, for complicated reasons maybe not even you know.

Of course you do your absolute best to find and hone and wield your divine gifts against the dark. You do your best to reach out tenderly to touch and elevate as many people as you can reach. You bring your naked love and defiant courage and salty grace to bear as much as you can, with all the attentiveness and humor you can muster; this is, after all, a miracle in which we live, and we ought to pay ferocious attention every moment, if possible.

But no, you cannot control anything. You cannot order or command everything. You cannot fix and repair everything. You cannot protect your children from pain and loss and tragedy and illness. You cannot be sure that you will always be married, let alone happily married. You cannot be sure you will always be employed, or healthy, or relatively sane.

All you can do is face the world with quiet grace and hope you make a sliver of difference. Humility does not mean self-abnegation, lassitude, detachment; it's more like a calm recognition that you must trust in

Illustration by M.P. Wiggins

Was it supposed to be *pear* in spirit,
or something artsy like that?





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that which does not make sense, that which is unreasonable, illogical, silly, ridiculous, crazy by the measure of most of our culture; you must trust that you being a very good you matters somehow. That trying to be an honest and tender parent will echo for centuries through your tribe. That doing your chosen work with creativity and diligence will shiver people far beyond your ken. That being an attentive and generous friend and citizen will somehow matter in the social fabric, save a thread or two from unraveling. And you must do all of this with the sure and certain knowledge that you will never get proper credit for it, at all, one bit, and in fact the vast majority of the things you do right will go utterly unremarked; except, perhaps, in ways we will never know or understand, by the Arab Jew who once shouted about his cloak, and may have been somehow also the One who invented and infuses this universe and probably a million others—not to put a hard number on it or anything.

Humility, the final frontier, as my late brother Kevin used to say. When we are young we build a self, a persona, a story in which to reside, or several selves in succession, or several at once, sometimes; when we are older we take on other roles and personas, other masks and duties; and you and I both know men and women who become trapped in the selves they worked so hard to build, so desperately imprisoned that sometimes they smash their lives simply to escape who they no longer wish to be; but finally, I think, if we are lucky, if we read the book of pain and loss with humility, we realize that we are all broken and small and brief, that none among us is actually rich or famous or more beautiful than another; and then, perhaps, we begin to understand something deep and true finally about humility.

This is what I know: that the small is huge, that the tiny is vast, that pain is part and parcel of the gift of joy, and that there is love, and then there is everything else. You either walk toward love or away from it with every breath you draw. Humility is the road to love. Humility, maybe, *is* love. That could be. *I* wouldn't know; I am a muddle and a conundrum, shuffling slowly along the road, gaping in wonder, trying to just see and say what is, trying to leave shreds and shards of ego along the road like wisps of litter and chaff. ■

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland (Ore.) and the author most recently of the essay collection So Very Much the Best of Us (ACTA Publications).



A Palestinian Christian sings hymns during a prayer service on the Mount of Olives, East Jerusalem.

Mary of Nazareth 2015

At the Basilica of Annunciation
In Nazareth, the statue of the Virgin Mary
Leans toward the eye with raptured
Determination, moving beyond her icon
To run toward the voice of Gabriel,
A poem from God, the muse of the Holy Spirit.

Just before Mass, a Palestinian girl moves
Through the congregation catching my eye,
Her hymnbooks in Arabic; her smile, alive
With grace, magnifies movement. Black hair
On shoulders, her blue dress captures the mystery:
This Mary now un-statued stands before me—

No Gabriel sent from God, but a man.
I shrug my shoulders and smile: “English.”
She laughs and glides by. I am left to celebrate
The peace, share broken bread while she sings
A Magnificat of praise in Arabic rhythms,
Then leads a nun to a microphone for prayer.

*Kemmer Anderson, author of
Songs of Bethlehem: Nativity
Poems, has taught for 38 years
at the McCallie School in
Chattanooga, Tenn.*

Photo by Ryan Rodrick Beiler

A full-page background image of Tom Cruise in his role as Ethan Hunt from the movie Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation. He is wearing a grey tactical suit with a triangular logo on the shoulder and is holding a large, futuristic silver handgun. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. In the background, there are tall city buildings and several white, spherical drones with red eyes and blue lights, flying in the sky.

The white male
lead of *Oblivion*.

By Abby Olcese

The Power and the **Story**

The film industry is dominated by white men. Does it matter?

GROWING UP, my pop culture heroes were all nerds. I gravitated toward the quippiest, smartest characters I could find; misunderstood geniuses with an arsenal of world-saving ideas and killer one-liners, who swaggered off awkwardly into the sunset, toting books the same way Clint Eastwood did his gun.

These characters are still important to me, but here's the problem: Nearly all of them were men. In idolizing *Ghostbusters*' Egon Spengler and *Jurassic Park*'s Ian Malcolm, I grew up thinking that, if I wanted to be like them, I had to reject all things girl. It took me a long time to realize I could be cool *and* smart *and* feminine.

Movies and TV teach us to love good guys and hate bad guys. But when heroes only look a certain way, says writer and Pepperdine University professor Craig Detweiler, we come to believe certain population groups are the only ones who can inhabit those roles. "Movies paint people in ... stark categories, and those categories transpose into everyday life," Detweiler said in an interview with *Sojourners*. "If you only see one kind of hero, you only have one kind of heroic role model."

A narrow definition of heroism is as much a race issue as a gender issue. Leslie Foster,

42 Iris DeMent's Crooked Path

Roots country meets Russian poetry

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Two books on the price of just war theory

45 Sermons for Life

Julie Polter reviews *Creation-Crisis Preaching*

good representations of these groups in TV and film positively affect viewers' opinions of them.

To help our understanding of each other, we need diverse characters. To get them, we need diverse storytellers. Unfortunately, we aren't getting enough of either. Last August, a USC Annenberg report, *Inequality in 700 Popular Films*, revealed that from 2007-2014, the top-grossing movies in the U.S. were overwhelmingly white, straight, and male-

If having diversity in what we watch is good for us, and diverse audiences are buying tickets, why is the industry so reluctant to change?

centric. In the 100 movies surveyed in 2014, 73.1 percent of characters were Caucasian. Only 28.1 percent of the speaking roles were women, and only 19 *total* characters were lesbian, gay, or bisexual (none were transgender). Of the 700 top films from 2007 to 2014, 28 had a woman behind the camera.

The movies reflect one reality, but they don't reflect actual audiences. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, in 2014 women bought 50 percent of film tickets, and Latinos, who make up 17 percent of the population, were responsible for 23 percent of tickets sold.

"It's like the Wild West"

So, if having diversity respected in what we watch is good for us, and diverse audiences are buying tickets, why is the industry so reluctant to change?

Foster says one reason is the misconception that there's a limit to how many stories about minority experiences need to be told. He cites a meeting he had with a studio to pitch a project on the life of Frederick Douglass before his escape to freedom (Foster asked *Sojourners* to omit the studio's name from the story).

"[The studio] told us, 'This sounds like a really great project, but we already have a

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New & Noteworthy



From the film *Am I*

BEING BETWEEN

The documentary film *Am I: Too African to be American or Too American to be African?* focuses on young African women who live in the U.S. and West Africa but identify with both cultures. How do they work out unique twists in the issues of race, complexion, gender, and family heritage?

REVEALING THE WORD

Nyasha Junior, assistant professor of Hebrew Bible at Temple University, has written *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation*, an accessible and forward-looking guide to African-American women's contributions to biblical scholarship. WJK Press

REVIVED AGAIN

Daniel Ramírez delves into the vibrant roots of a transnational spiritual movement in *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century*. Firsthand accounts and attention to innovations in worship and music expand our understanding of this world-changing expression of Christianity. UNC Press

BEAUTY AND TRUTH

The Operation of Grace: Further Essays on Art, Faith, and Mystery collects a decade of essays by Gregory Wolfe, founder and editor of the literary journal *Image*. His elegant, provocative insights are infused with passion for how faith and art can nurture and challenge each other. Cascade Books

a black filmmaker, says he's often grappled with the impact popular culture has on what society deems normal.

"I've realized that it had an effect on what I found aesthetically attractive, and I've had to untangle that as an adult," Foster told *Sojourners*. "I tell people to look at the makeup aisle, and see what colors get categorized as 'nude.' It's always white."

The power to change minds

The stories we encounter can reinforce or damage how we see ourselves, and how we categorize others. When done well, they can encourage understanding between different races, genders, or sexual orientations. Research into parasocial relationships (the feeling of emotional attachment to fictional characters) and intergroup contact theory (the idea that ethnically diverse social relationships decrease prejudice) has shown that

The Crooked Path of Iris DeMent

NOTHING ABOUT Iris DeMent is predictable. She has what may be the most downhome country singing voice in American popular music today, but she really grew up in Los Angeles. Her family fled her Arkansas birthplace after her father led an unsuccessful wildcat strike at his factory job and was rendered unemployable at home.

DeMent was the youngest in a family of 14 children and grew up in the Assemblies of God church. Her personal favorite among her six albums is *Lifeline*, which features her sitting at the piano singing gospel hymns such as “Blessed Assurance” and “Sweet Hour of Prayer.” Yet her 2012 album, *Sing the Delta*, featured a song titled “The Night I Learned How Not to Pray,” and an earlier song, “Let the Mystery Be” (now the theme song for the HBO series *The Leftovers*), professes agnosticism about the whole business of where we come from and where we are going.

Still, in a recent interview in *Discussions* magazine, DeMent confessed that she understands her



Singer Iris DeMent

That silence ended with *Sing the Delta*, which was a bit of a surprise itself. After decades of living in the Midwest, marrying fellow singer-songwriter Greg Brown and adopting a child with him, DeMent looped back and produced a set of songs steeped in obsession with her Arkansas roots. Now, after only three years, comes another album and another surprise. *The Trackless Woods* finds DeMent singing poems by the Russian writer Anna Akhmatova, who lived through the Stalinist persecutions.

THE PAIRING OF DeMent and Akhmatova seems odd at first. DeMent is, in Russian terms, a daughter of the proletariat, just one generation removed from the peasantry and very much a traditionalist in the forms of her art. Meanwhile Akhmatova was an avant-garde fallen aristocrat who pursued a bohemian existence and left her only son to be raised by her mother-in-law. But DeMent's choice begins to make sense when you know that her daughter was adopted from Russia at age 6. The singer encountered Akhmatova as she sought to understand the culture of her child's early years.

Then there is that deep connection that U.S. Southern writers—from William Faulkner

to Flannery O'Connor to Ernest Gaines—have felt with their Russian counterparts. The Russians are, after all, the Southerners of Europe, at the edge of the continent both geographically and culturally, set apart by a tragic sense of history, a fanatic devotion to the land, and the pervasive influence of indigenous Christian traditions. In fact you could say that Russia is as “Christ-haunted” as O'Connor's south Georgia or DeMent's Arkansas.

This comes through in the poems DeMent has chosen to sing. There are the spiritual reflections, such as “Lot's Wife” and “Prayer.” And then there is “Not With Deserters,” a statement of Akhmatova's determination to stay in her homeland and fight, even when she had opportunities to escape into comfortable exile.

The Trackless Woods probably isn't a great starting place for someone unfamiliar with Iris DeMent's work. (I'd recommend that the novice start with *Sing the Delta* and work back.) But for those of us who've patiently followed her for more than 20 years, it does show a new scope to her ambition that leaves us eager for whatever's next. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, a Sojourners contributing writer and author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University.

Russia is as 'Christ-haunted' as Flannery O'Connor's Georgia or DeMent's Arkansas.

musical work as a “calling” and said, “I've always thought more in my spiritual world—and my connection to whatever brought me here and whatever is going to take me out—than any notion of a career.”

The crooked path of her career certainly bears that out. In the great 1990s flowering of alternative country, DeMent popped out three albums that had critics comparing her to her idol and fellow California refugee Merle Haggard. But then came a 16-year silence, broken in the middle only by the aforementioned gospel record.



Continued from Page 41

slave property,” Foster said. “Their feeling was that they just needed one; they didn’t need to tell these other stories.”

An ongoing investigation by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides further insight. The EEOC is investigating allegations of studios discriminating against women directors and failure by the Directors Guild of America (DGA)—the industry’s union representative—to ensure equal hires actually happened.

This comes after years of campaigning by filmmakers such as Maria Giese, who spent four years gathering data to present to the American Civil Liberties Union, who then campaigned for the EEOC to investigate. “It’s like the Wild West,” Giese said. “[Studios] are making movies and TV shows, and they feel

“Seeking out stories about people who aren’t like you is one of the easiest ways to expand your heart, mind, and experience.”

—Craig Detweiler

no compunction to hire anyone other than their own individual aesthetic choices.”

While parts of the DGA’s legal agreements with studios require them to make diverse hires, these vague statements place women and ethnic minorities into the same category. Meaning if a studio needs to fulfill a diversity requirement, they can—and, Giese says, often do—exclude women.

“What became evident was that the studio executives and showrunners could hire ethnic minority men only, and keep in compliance with the agreement,” Giese said. “They were making their good faith effort to increase the hires, but they didn’t have to hire any women.”

Studios look for loopholes because, as director and producer Angela Robinson told Southern California Public Radio in a 2014 interview, the financial risk involved encourages them to make “safe” choices.

“It’s one of the rare professions where you give somebody ... \$50 million to \$100 million to go make something,” Robinson told SCPR. There’s “a culture of fear around



Michael Fassbender
in *Steve Jobs*

THE UNINITIATED

MICHAEL FASSBENDER’S uncanny performance as Apple Inc. co-founder and CEO Steve Jobs begs the question of how someone so clueless about human relationships could win the hearts of so many people. Of course, the performance and the Aaron Sorkin script it’s based on are not the same thing as the man himself. Steve Jobs may be unfairly treated by **Steve Jobs**. The question of its accuracy is not unimportant, and people who knew him deserve a hearing. But the film only sketches a persona rather than providing an encyclopedia of the soul.

Treating *Steve Jobs* as a film about power and personality evokes the Quaker teacher Parker Palmer’s notion of an “undivided” life. Palmer quotes Rumi’s warning, “If you are here unfaithfully with us, you’re causing terrible damage.” One facet of this unfaithfulness is the difference between living “from the inside out” and living primarily for external reward. Undivided lives are punctuated by initiatory experience, familiar to our ancestors, and now re-emerging in communities such as the ManKind Project and Woman Within. Initiatory experiences take people into the depth of their psyches, supported by wise elders, opening a crack that lets in the light of transformation. Initiated egos thrive in balanced service to the highest self and the common good (so the wise elders tell me).

The Steve Jobs in *Steve Jobs* has no

such initiation—he seems basically the same shallow egotist at the end of the movie as he was at the start. The joy of *Steve Jobs* is the kinetic dance of image and sound, and actors at the top of their game (Kate Winslet as the definition of long-suffering colleague, Seth Rogen in a rare dramatic role, and Michael Stuhlbarg, all of them representing prickly conscience). The problem of *Steve Jobs* is that it omits engagement with the personal transformation that many think unfolded for him as his products achieved something like omnipresence. There’s no initiation here, unlike in **Bridge of Spies**, where Tom Hanks risks his life to negotiate a prisoner swap in a gripping, if light, Cold War thriller. Mark Rylance’s accused Soviet spy emerges more humanized than Jobs’ community-building entrepreneur.

This is remarkable: In allowing the beloved Steve Jobs to be selfish, *Steve Jobs* may make us look at ourselves. In allowing Rylance’s enemy of “our” values to be human, *Bridge of Spies* may lead us to ask where else we may demonize people who are just doing what they feel is right. It’s not a comprehensive answer to violent human conflict, but to invoke Apple’s best advertising slogan, if we felt the pain and circumstances of others as our own, how would we “think different”? ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and the founder of www.moviesandmeaning.com.



A scene from
The Mask You Live In

relinquishing any sort of power around that.” She thinks that people are frightened to “go even an inch outside of their comfort zone at all, literally, for class, race, gender, sexuality.”

Unjust for filmmakers—and viewers

Culture colors our perceptions of ourselves and of others. It can also influence how we encounter God. Detweiler, who said he traces his spiritual roots to watching *Raging Bull* as a kid, says he finds profundity in film that he doesn’t always find in church.

“Film touches my heart in ways that sermons can’t,” Detweiler told *Sojourners*. “Seeking out stories about people who aren’t like you is one of the easiest ways to expand your heart, mind, and experience—and all you have to do is press ‘play.’”

Foster says he also experiences film as a way to see others compassionately. “Movies allow us to walk in someone else’s experiences,” Foster said. “They can take down barriers that exist in an academic argument and make their point in a gentle and subversive way.”

If TV and film have this much influence over us, then discrimination in Hollywood isn’t limited to the injustice of shutting out diverse voices. It also means we’re missing out on stories that can change conversations and help dismantle prejudice. We’re missing potential cultural moments that could allow us to better understand and minister to our neighbors.

The studio offices of Hollywood may seem distant and unreachable, but audiences still have an impact. Because the industry is built on what makes money, we must be intentional consumers if we want real

change. Pay attention to what movies and shows get recognition, and who makes them. Support projects that come from underrepresented voices, and abstain from ones that reinforce stereotypes.

We can also support organizations working to encourage diverse, culturally sensitive media. One, The Representation Project, produces films (2015’s *The Mask You Live In* being the most recent) about the role of media stereotypes in promoting gender inequality. Another, Media Rise, connects filmmakers with activists and social scientists to help their messages reach audiences. The 2014 Media Rise Festival brought together more than 700 established and emerging voices for the chance to share their stories and pitch ideas.

I’M STILL reconciling the long-term effects of my early movie heroes. Maybe having more women to look up to would have changed my trajectory, maybe it wouldn’t. I’ll never know. But, Giese says, making sure there are more protagonists of every race and gender—as well as parity reached in who gets to tell their stories—can ensure future generations won’t risk being negatively affected.

“We have to think about what the ramifications are for women, girls, men, and boys all over the world,” Giese said, regarding female filmmakers. “We are not getting our best voices out there. Those best voices are going to come from everywhere.” ■

Abby Olcese, former advertising assistant at Sojourners, is a freelance writer based in Kansas.

Reviewed by Weldon D. Nisly

JESUS AND THE LIES OF WAR

***Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War*, by Robert Emmet Meagher. Cascade Books. *Borderline: Reflections on War, Sex, and Church*, by Stan Goff. Cascade Books.**

DAYS AFTER 9/11, a just war philosopher and I were interviewed on Christian radio. I’m a pacifist who served on peace teams in Nicaragua and Iraq. My co-interviewee called for waging war on “terrorists” because we must kill our enemies while loving them. My plea to listen to Jesus and victims of war was scorned.

Two compelling recent challenges to Christian justifications for war are Robert Emmet Meagher’s *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* and Stan Goff’s *Borderline: Reflections on War, Sex, and Church*.

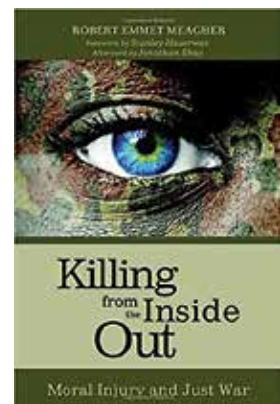
Meagher, a humanities scholar, incorporates listening to veterans of war into his work. Goff writes as someone who was a soldier before being transformed by Jesus.

Three issues in both books—just war, masculine sexual violence, and moral injury—resonate with my peace team encounters with war. Through very different approaches, Meagher and Goff offer the best reflection on these concerns that I’ve seen; both rightly implicate the church.

First, just war has a sordid rather than sanctifying history. Meagher’s survey of ancient literature, scripture, and Christian history reveals its legacy as antithetical to Jesus’ teaching: “Since the time of Constantine

... just war doctrine has served to license and legitimize state and ecclesiastical violence and to draw a convenient, if imaginary, line between killing and murder.”

Meagher documents the church’s role in envisioning and biblically supporting just war. He rightly calls just war a “deadly lie”



that deludes us with the “possibility of war without sin.”

Goff confesses that, in his experience, waging war was not about defending or loving anyone, but about “martial manhood, a death cult, I’ve come to see, was my religion.” Speaking out of his current faith Goff proclaims, “Violence and domination characterize a world in rebellion. Yet we can embody the kingdom of heaven as the body of Christ—the peaceable kingdom—here and now, as testimony to the redemptive lordship of Christ to a broken world. That is where I start.”

Second, war is shaped by and shapes masculinity that perpetuates sexual violence and the domination of women consistent with domination of the enemy.

Drawing on history, culture, theology, feminism, and his combat experience, Goff unveils the perverse masculinity of war, declaring, “We cannot separate war and the contempt for and subjugation of women.” He names two questions as the themes of his book: “First, why have Christians been so warlike? Second, why do Christian men still caricature, dominate, misrepresent, condescend to, and dismiss women?” Goff beautifully counters the masculine war on women with Jesus’ way with women. His best biblical insight takes us to Jesus eating dinner with men (Luke 7:36-50) who were scandalized when a woman entered and washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and hair. Jesus confronts them with the question: “Do you see this woman?” Goff confronts men now with

“War invariably makes soldiers do bad things, and we become what we do.”

this same question throughout his book.

Meagher helps us “come face to face with the sexuality of war and conquest” in ancient literature and church history. I longed for him to explore what it means to confront sexual violence in war today, but I understand that his task is writing an obituary for just war doctrine.

Third, in addition to the death and destruction suffered by victims of war,

combatants are also wounded by war.

Meagher exposes the wounds of war known today as moral injury—“the violation, by oneself or another, of a personally embedded moral code or value resulting in deep injury to the psyche or soul.” My experience listening to a mother’s heart-breaking story of her Iraq war veteran son who took his own life confirms Meagher’s claim: “Military suicide today is not some undecipherable, modern, or even postmodern aberration ... it is the lamentable legacy of a long tradition of justified war and inevitable moral injury.”

Reviewed by Julie Polter

SERMONS FOR LIFE

***Creation-Crisis Preaching: Ecology, Theology, and the Pulpit*, by Leah D. Schade. Chalice Press.**

PREACHING A SERMON on an issue debated in the public square: It’s complicated. Make that issue the climate crisis, and it’s really, really complicated. Even in congregations where climate change is not broadly disputed, a pastor faces the challenge of crafting a gospel-informed message that doesn’t swing either to naïve ways we might “make it all better” or pessimistic apathy.

But there’s evidence it’s worth the work and risks: In terms of policy issues, climate is one where a clergy leader’s word has proven impact. According to a 2014 survey by the Public Religion Research Institute and the American Academy of Religion, Americans with a clergy leader who “speaks at least occasionally about climate change” are more likely to be concerned about the issue than those “who attend congregations where the issue is rarely or never raised.”

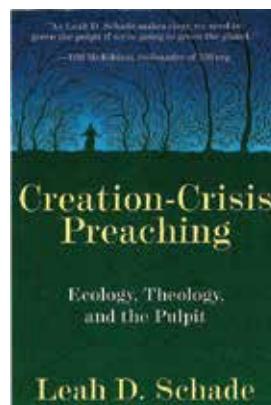
So where does a preacher begin and with what goals?

Leah D. Schade’s *Creation-Crisis Preaching* equips pastors to name the present crisis and preach a call to action and healing. She describes one theological path to sermons infused with both testimony of the sacredness of God’s creation and our call to

Goff laments that “war, as a practice, does not inculcate honor as often as hatred, hostility, cruelty, and the fragmentation of the soldier’s personality. Bad soldiers do not make war a bad thing. War invariably makes soldiers do bad things, and we become what we do.”

Meagher and Goff both make clear that there can be no just war. Jesus calls us to become who we *are* in Christ, not what we *do* in war or because of war. ■

Weldon D. Nisly is a retired Mennonite pastor from Seattle.



be agents of the world’s healing. Schade is a Lutheran pastor and anti-fracking activist who has also done doctoral work focused on homiletics and ecological theology. Appropriately, in this book she explores both the theoretical underpinnings and the practicalities of climate-crisis preaching. Her approach is clear-eyed about the current dire situation of creation, but also committed

to hope: “Because I am a Lutheran homiletician,” she writes, “I am compelled to find a way to preach the *eco-resurrection*, even when most signs indicate that Good Friday may be the fate of our planet.”

Schade sketches the sometimes contentious and damaging history of religion’s relationship to the environment, some different approaches to ecological theology, and a “green” hermeneutic for interpreting scripture.” She explores briefly how social change theory can inform the vocation of preaching and the role sermons might play in a social movement.

Drawing on social change theory, Schade suggests three approaches to environmental preaching: “consciousness-raising, call for action, and sustainable change,” giving examples of each from others’ sermons

and her own. Her passion for the power of preaching is contagious as she calls the reader to imagine sermons “in which, over time, lifestyles and cultures are changed, greened, and sustained by a long-term vision of God’s care for creation through our hearts, minds, and hands.”

Schade names commitment to the theology of the cross and resurrection as her starting point as she articulates what she calls a “Lutheran ecofeminist Christology.” And she argues that it is not only “possible to defend a commitment to preaching that is responsible to the gospel while also being responsive to ecofeminist theology,” but that attention to such theology “is a natural extension of ... the gospel’s concern with ‘the least of these’ and the good news about the coming of God’s peaceable community.”

Nonetheless, perhaps some readers from more conservative theological traditions will be wary of the chapters that explore feminist ecotheology or assume they hold nothing of value for them. I’d encourage them to read all of this material anyway, both to learn more about the links that might be made between the oppression of women and the degradation of creation,

Preaching on the climate crisis: It’s complicated.

and as inspiration to explore more deeply the theology and scriptural resources in their own traditions that they might tap to preach about the climate crisis.

As someone who has pastored several congregations, Schade notes the tension that can arise from preaching about tough issues, describing as an example a conversation with a congregation member who disagreed with one of her sermons. The preacher must also be a pastor, attentive to pastoral relationships and open to critique and follow-up conversations.

This is a book that is forthright about the crisis facing creation. But it is also committed to the belief that God is moving in this world and will guide us in being agents of healing and change. ■

Julie Polter is a senior associate editor of *Sojourners*.



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Reviewed by Greg Williams

MYTHS OF MASCULINITY

***Man Enough: How Jesus Redefines Manhood*, by Nate Pyle. Zondervan.**

MOST CULTURES have ways to initiate boys into manhood. Being a man is thus seen as an earned status that must be maintained, which can generate tremendous anxiety. (This is similar to what Simone de Beauvoir observes in *The Second Sex* about being a woman—one is not born but rather becomes one.) I’ve felt this anxiety myself in social spaces where masculinity is outside of the norm: I’m forced to think through how I am a man and what that means.

Nate Pyle confronts some of this anxiety in *Man Enough*. He explores how being rooted in Christ can seat the Christian man’s identity more firmly in Jesus. Rather than trying to frantically maintain any particular form of masculinity, we can rest our identity in Christ.

This is key to freeing us from ridiculous posturing and status games. Pyle fleshes his argument out not only through scripture and ethical reflection but also by powerfully recalling his own personal development as a man.

Still, as Pyle puts it, “saying Jesus defines what it means to be a man is easy; actually defining manhood in light of Jesus is harder.” We have so many pictures of Jesus in the New Testament, from the righteously angry Jesus condemning the false teachers of his day to the Christ restraining his power and submitting to death on a cross. Perhaps, Pyle argues, this is the point: Jesus is complex, so any picture of how to be a man (or a woman) needs to be similarly complex.

A focus on Jesus to define masculinity

snaps apart rigid gender roles, since both men and women are called to follow him in their Christian paths. Although Jesus was biologically a man, his moral example can’t be defined as male or female. Self-giving love is a model for both genders and all people.

Not only does looking to Jesus give us a healthier picture of what manhood is, but it properly locates attempts to be men in God’s grace. Putting on Jesus is an initiation, but it is one that happens by grace. In that grace, men need not be anxious about the perceived need to compete with others for a limited pool of patriarchal power, but can rest in God’s abundance.

This gives us the ability, as Pyle sees, to make space for healthier relationships with women as well as healthier relationships with other men, since we are free from a constant pressure to prove our masculinity. We can build honest relationships with others since our masculinity is not based in ourselves but in Jesus.

As Stephen Covey puts it, the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing. Pyle does just that in *Man Enough* by constantly drawing our attention to Jesus and the grace found through him. If these are the main things on which we focus, then men have the chance to find some answers to deep-seated anxieties about masculinity. ■

Greg Williams is the communications director at an advocacy organization in Washington, D.C.

Julia de la Cruz

Bio: Julia de la Cruz, originally from Mexico, is a farm-worker, an organizer, and a member of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW). After forging agreements with 14 of the largest food retailers in the U.S.—including Walmart, McDonald's, Trader Joe's, and Chipotle—to establish labor standards and fair wages for tomato workers, CIW launched the Fair Food Program, a partnership among growers, farm workers, and retail food companies ensuring fair pay and humane working conditions on participating farms. This interview was conducted in English and Spanish, with Elena Stein, a faith organizer for Alliance for Fair Food, translating.

1 Why have farm workers in the U.S. continually faced unfair wages and inhumane working conditions? The body that was most responsible was not the growers who employ us, but actually the corporations at the very top of the supply chain who use their enormous purchasing power to demand artificially low costs of the produce we harvest. That demand results in growers cutting costs in the one place where they can: labor. And there you get the poverty and exploitation that we have experienced for decades.

2 Does it help farm workers if consumers stop purchasing products that are grown in bad working conditions? More and more we hear this idea of voting with your fork: this idea that consumers affect conditions based on how they use their dollar. But the truth is that if somebody chooses to refrain from buying a good, the impact really won't be felt by corporations such that they'll be forced to change their policies. But corporations *will* be impacted and forced to change their policies when a worker-led campaign forces them.

So we'd ask consumers to build consciousness by listening to farm workers and their experience and their analysis of the food system that nourishes each of us. The second thing we'd ask for is commitment—and that can mean a lot of things, but it definitely means getting to the street and protesting the corporations that have turned a blind eye to the abuses they have perpetuated.

3 What has the Fair Food Program accomplished? For the first time ever we, as farm workers, have the right in Florida tomato fields to shade. We have the right to water. We have the right to speak up about abuse we've experienced without fear of retaliation. We have the right to clean bathrooms that are nearby. We have the right to the first wage increase in more than 30 years, which is a penny per pound bonus that we demanded from the participating corporations. The most beautiful thing of all is that for the



first time we, as workers, know our rights. We have defined our rights, we have created new rights, and we are aware of those rights.

4 What challenges are farm workers still facing? The biggest challenge is how we expand [the Fair Food] program to cover all workers. How do we get the remaining 10 percent of growers in the tomato industry to come on board? How do we convince all the other crop [growers] throughout Florida? How do we convince all the other states throughout the U.S. to implement this program and educate all of these workers about their rights, because it's what all of them deserve?

5 You've said that farm workers are demanding justice, not charity. What's the difference? With charity, anybody can give something to us and feel good about themselves—this reinforces the structure that exists. But in seeking justice, we are demanding that we be compensated fairly for the hard work that we do. The result is that we will not rely on charity, but rather be able to support ourselves from the wages that we've earned. It's a long-term, deep, and structural change rather than a reinforcement of the relationship that we have right now.

—Interview by Betsy Shirley

Is There a Crack in Everything?

THE YEAR IS YOUNG AGAIN. Folks are making soon-to-be-broken New Year's resolutions. Why not preachers? Resolved: Prepare to preach far enough in advance that the Holy Spirit has some time to work with me. Preachers I admire sketch an entire year out in advance. Pastor Ken Shigematsu at Tenth Church in Vancouver, B.C., suggests that we're creative on 10-day cycles. So he begins working in earnest on a sermon 10 days before he preaches it. Whatever system you come up with, resolve not to preach "Saturday night specials." Sure, the adrenaline is nice, but it's as hard to be creative on demand as it is to be intimate on schedule. That way, when you have a brilliant insight you can see that it fits, say, 10 weeks from now, and that insight is not lost if it fails to live up to the demands of a sermon to be preached in 10 hours.

Epiphany is one of our best, most underutilized words. The chapel at our seminary is blessedly named Epiphany chapel. For no actual connection to God happens in preaching without the illuminating light of the Spirit. I like to preach through the old hymn "We Three Kings" at least once during Epiphany. It reminds us who God is: God is born in our flesh, hailed as prophet and as king, and will die at our hands. Especially during an election year in the United States, when many ridiculous things will be said about God, we do well to remember these particular claims about who God is.



Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at the University of British Columbia's Vancouver School of Theology.

[JANUARY 3]

Costly Materiality

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

THERE ARE TOO many great texts here for one Sunday. The Hebrew scriptures speak of the radiance of God's people as they return from exile, full of grain and wine and oil and fat, dancing with their faces radiant. After the holidays we may also feel full of fat for other, much less God-related, reasons. But the church feasts while others fast and vice versa. Ephesians, with its masterful run-on sentences about God's cosmic purposes in Christ, could keep you busy for a year.

But this John text is too lovely to pass up. You could chew on any of its magnificent phrases and never exhaust their depths: "Without him not one thing came into being"; his "life was the light of all people"; and "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." I'm not sure we've ever come to grips with the radical nature of this passage. Most faiths, our own included much of the time, are world-denying, body-denying, materiality-denying. There are good reasons for that. Orthodox philosopher David Bentley Hart says anyone who's ever

been hit by a car can understand the allure of Platonism. Time, bodies, materiality cause most of our suffering. We might have expected the Word to become flesh and be disgusted with embodiment. Instead, the Word shines with glory, like the faces of the Israelites dancing as they return from exile. This is the scandalous heart of the Christian faith: that God has a Jewish mom, that God has a spleen and eyelashes and toenails, that God becomes everything we are—to make us everything God is.

[JANUARY 10]

Before Heaven Opens

Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

BAPTISM PLAYS INTO each of these passages. Isaiah promises God will be with us as God was with the Israelites on their way through the waters of the Red Sea. The psalm imagines God's voice in a violent way,

tearing across the waters and stripping the forest bare. Acts says some folks "believe" who know nothing of the Holy Spirit. They've only been baptized in Jesus' name. So the apostles come and baptize them and they speak in tongues. And John the Baptist insists he'll decrease. Luke narrates Jesus' baptism in the past perfect tense: "After Jesus was baptized," before the heavens open up.

The early church theologians often see in John's charming description of being

Watch the light weave itself throughout these readings.

unworthy to untie Jesus' sandal a pointer to the incarnation. Sandals, after all, are made of animal skins. In Christ, God has taken on an animal skin—that is, our flesh. John is saying he's not even worthy to touch God's humanity. How much less is he worthy to touch Christ's divinity? So all John does is point to Jesus from afar.

Yet God doesn't stay aloof. Never does. When (not if) we are in fire or water over our heads, God is with us. God's voice hurtles through nature and has all cry glory. Apostles show up at our doorstep to tell us there is so much more of God than we thought. And anytime we look at them aright, the heavens are split and God is closer than we might think safe.

[JANUARY 17]

Extravagant Light

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

ONE OF POPE John Paul II's quieter gifts was to encourage Catholics to pray through the "mysteries of light" as part of the rosary: the baptism of the Lord, the wedding at Cana, the preaching of the kingdom, the transfiguration, and the institution of the Eucharist (being pope does have its perks). Watch the light weave itself throughout these readings. It bursts from Isaiah's promise to make Israel God's bride. It shines from the psalm's gratitude: "In your light we see light." Paul makes clear no one can see Christ's light without the Spirit's power. And light bursts through every crack in the story of John

2—even as light isn't mentioned! It's hard not to "see" this story in my mind without imagining it as Caravaggio would have painted it—with a light so numinous all ask, "How'd he do that?!"

In the Cana story, Mary gives us a directive always worth following: "Do whatever he tells you." This after her son sasses her in public! The steward utters a truth the depths of which he cannot know: No one saves the good wine for last. Except God, that is. Water is good. Wine is glorious. A party is good. An unending tap at an endless wedding banquet is better. Christians so often contrast ourselves positively with negatively portrayed Israel. But God becomes Jewish flesh. And the kingdom God brings is filled with light and wine and extravagance all around.

[JANUARY 24]

Knowing Our Stories

**Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19;
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21**

ANYONE WHO'S BEEN around the church has likely heard the metaphor of the body of Christ. And probably gotten tired of it. We tune out. The preacher is yakking, but all we can hear is "yada yada yada."

Scripture knows this. So Nehemiah tells us the story of a rediscovered scroll, of the people assembled to hear what scholars think was the book of Deuteronomy. They weep. They haven't heard this before. Why have they gone their whole lives without this direction, this beauty, this gift from God?

Of course they had nature and its manifold beauties. The psalmist tells us the whole creation shouts with God's glory from every

**God becomes everything we are—
to make us everything God is.**

leaf and flower and grain of sand. But it's not enough. We also need to know the stories and songs we can only get in full from scripture. And more specifically, from Jesus. He preaches his first sermon in his hometown, and the only content we get is this: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Imagine! Someone should have grabbed that manuscript and recorded the whole

thing for posterity. But perhaps the evangelist recorded all that was necessary. Scripture is fulfilled in Christ. Christ is its chief interpreter. And the body of which Christ is head honors its weaker members above all others.

Weep if you've not heard this. But laugh that we can now go on hearing it unendingly.

[JANUARY 31]

From Cliff to Cross

**Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6;
1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30**

SOME OF THE APPEAL of the Christmas season, and of the current Epiphany season, is all the baby stuff. Baby Jesus getting born. Baby Jesus receiving gifts from the magi. This is appropriate—we Christians worship God as an infant. And Jesus was insistent about his love for children. But all the baby talk can lend itself to the worst sort of sentimentality.

These texts can return some realism to our notion of babyhood. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet before he was born (1:5). The psalmist talks about relying on God "from before my birth" (71:6). How'd that work out for Jeremiah? He was sawn in two, tradition has it. The psalmist's words are lived out best by Jesus in passages such as Luke 4. The preacher fumbles a perfectly good homecoming, throwing in the face of his fellow Nazarenes that God always prefers the outsider. They try to throw him off of a cliff. Later, we succeed in what they started, pushing him out of the world and onto a cross.

Then talk about texts we overly romanticize! The "love chapter" in Corinthians is not about weddings. It is about loving your worst enemy in the pew next to you, on the next pillow, or in the mirror. It is about love of those who want to saw you in two or crucify you. Never fear.

Nothing worse will happen to you than happened to Jesus, as Will Willimon likes to say. And nothing better can happen to you than Jesus' resurrection, which he will share with all of us. ■

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

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The Jokers Are On Us

IT'S THE START of the 2016 election year, and I know what you're thinking: "No it's not. It's the middle of December, and I haven't done *any* of my Christmas shopping!" Understood. But this is our *January* issue, and in our minds the ball has already dropped in Time Square, Ryan Seacrest's New Year's Eve was, once again, not rockin', and we've got serious political work to do.

Although at Sojourners we have to be very careful. In the coming year, we can speak prophetic truth about the issues facing our world but can't direct that same righteous fire at a candidate, because we're a certain kind of nonprofit, a 501C-3PO, I think. Nonprofits follow rigid federal rules against partisanship, and most of them don't make a profit. That part we're really good at. We never have any money left over. (Although once we bought a ham for our Christmas party. I had three slices. Sometimes it's okay to have a profit, as long as you eat it.)

Nonprofits are nothing like the political action committees that will be spending billions of dollars in the next election. PACs can raise unlimited money in support of



my eye on for Christmas. (*Come on, J.C. Penney gift card!*) But we do have a lot of curiosity about the people wanting to be president, the second most powerful person in the country after Jeff Bezos, who invented Amazon because he dreams of a world where the only human contact is with UPS drivers.

THERE AREN'T MANY candidates on the Democratic side—I can count them on one hand (because it's much closer than my foot)—but it's still an interesting group. You've got a former first lady, a former senator, and a former secretary of state. (What? That's one person!?) Then there's an older gentleman who sounds like he's angry because the bathroom is out of toilet paper. (I hate that.) And there may be another guy, who's recognizable by his fingertips, which are red and raw from barely hanging on.

Then there are the Republicans, at least the ones not eliminated through attrition, which is a Latin word meaning "failing to get the attention of billionaire casino magnate Sheldon Adelson."

Currently the Republican front-runners are this guy who owns his own jet, "Billion Air (Get It?)," and a retired neurosurgeon who, judging by many of his public statements, has been operating on his own brain to stay in practice. There's also something called a "huckabee," which I may have coughed up once, and a man whose name gives me *deja vu*, but with an exclamation point. And a bunch of others who, in alphabetical order, are not listed here.

Because of our 501(c)(3) status, we can't publicly call out these individuals with the clarion voice of biblical justice. But we can ask the questions Americans are most curious about:

• **Has Donald Trump ever vacuumed?** And if he did so, did the bag ever get full before he was through? (I hate that.) I'm picturing Mr. Trump cursing, then kneeling down to change bags in his living room, which you should never do because it releases old dust into the air again. And then his wife would yell at him from the kitchen, where she was emptying the dishwasher while holding a crying toddler. (Negotiating the challenges of marriage isn't easy.)

• **When was the last time Hillary Clinton made a sandwich?** I just can't picture it. On the other hand, I can easily imagine Bernie Sanders in his kitchen making a cheese sandwich with lettuce and fresh Vidalia onion. Yummy. But then he'd add ketchup and lose the independent vote.

QUESTIONS ASIDE, let's just appreciate the beauty of the democratic process, which this year will feature a ballot delivered to you with every purchase from Amazon. One order, one vote. The time has come. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Savor 2015. Next year could get ugly.

any candidate, but they can't coordinate with them. Which is why PACs have names such as "We Love Jeb Bush, Just Don't Tell Him That" and "Supporting Ted Cruz, But We Want It to Be a Surprise." It protects them from any appearance of collusion, which is unlawful and closely monitored by the Federal Election Commission, which would respond harshly by winking.

Unlike a PAC, Sojourners doesn't have unlimited anything (there were no seconds on the ham), except our unlimited love for justice, the Risen Savior, and this one sweater I have



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